NATION

HR head turns approver in NewsClick case

>> Page: 4 <<

BUSINESS

Market rebound loses steam in fag-end trade

>> Page: 7 <<

SPORTS

Nat'l sports awards: Shami, Sheetal draw rousing applause

>> Page: 8 <<

www.twitter.com/EnglishSalar
www.facebook.com/EnglishSalar
www.instagram.com/dailysalarenglish
youtube.com/@dailysalardigital

SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: https://salar.news www.magzter.com 10 JANUARY 2024 | WEDNESDAY | BENGALURU | 27 JUMADA II, 1445 AH Vol 4 | Issue No 6 | Pages: 8

Earlier in the day before testing postive for Covid, Thaawarchand Gehlot met with BJP leaders
PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

K'taka Guv tests positive for Covid, kept in quarantine

BENGALURU, 9 JAN

Karnataka Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot has tested positive for Covid-19 and is under home quarantine, the Special Secretary to the Governor, R Prabhu Shankar, said on Tuesday. "The governor has tested positive for Covid-19. He is being continuously monitored and his health is stable," Shankar said in a statement."Presently, he is quarantined at his residence. His scheduled programmes and appointments stand cancelled till further intimation," the official added. ***—PTI***

Sec 144 in MP after stone pelting on Ram Mandir rally

SHAJAPUR, 9 JAN

The district administration has imposed prohibitory orders under CrPC Section 144 in three areas of Madhya Pradesh's Shajapur city after some people threw stones on participants of a religious procession following a dispute. One person was injured in the incident which took place in Magaria area on Monday evening, a police official said, adding that adequate security has been deployed in the area and an FIR registered in this connection. Shajapur Collector Riju Bafna in a post on X said Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) has been imposed with immediate effect in three areas - Magaria, Kachhiwada and Lalpura. The situation is currently peaceful and a case has been registered against the miscreants and further legal action is being taken, he said. Seven-eight persons stopped a group of people on Nag-Nagin Road near a mosque at around 8.30pm on Monday when the latter were taking out a routine evening procession ahead of the Ram temple consecration ceremony in Ayodhya, as per the First Information Report (FIR) registered on a complaint by one Mohit Rathore, who was part of the procession. ***—PTI***

In biggest haul in Assam, drugs worth over Rs 100 cr seized

GUWAHATI, 9 JAN

In the biggest drug haul in Assam different types of the contraband valued at over Rs 100 crore was recovered in Karimganj district in the southern tip of the state on Tuesday and four peddlers were arrested, the police said. The operation was conducted jointly by the special task force of Assam police and Karimganj district police. The drugs were brought into Assam from Mizoram and three persons from that state were among He was quick to add that prices of narcotics have gone up due to continuous and effective operations and aggressive actions by Assam Police.
Asked about details of the operation, Mahanta said "We got an input about movement of drugs from Mizoram and initiated the operation. We intercepted a car bearing Mizoram registration plate at Suprakandi under Nilambazar police station (in Karimganj) at around 2.15 pm on Tuesday," ***—PTI***

'Global economy to slow for 3rd straight year in 2024'

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

Hobbled by high interest rates, persistent inflation, slumping trade and a diminished China, the global economy will slow for a third consecutive year in 2024.

That is the picture sketched by the World Bank, which forecast Tuesday that the world economy will expand just 2.4 per cent this year. That would be down from 2.6 per cent growth in 2023, 3 per cent in 2022 and a galloping 6.2 per cent in 2021, which reflected the robust recovery from the pandemic recession of 2020.

Heightened global tensions, arising particularly from Israel's war with Hamas and the conflict in Ukraine, pose the risk of even weaker growth. And World Bank officials express worry that deeply indebted poor countries cannot afford to make necessary investments to fight climate change and poverty.

"Near-term growth will remain weak, leaving many developing countries especially the poorest stuck in a trap: with paralyzing levels of debt and tenuous access to food for nearly one out of every three people," Indermit Gill, the World Bank's chief economist, said in a statement.

World economy will expand just 2.4 per cent this year ***PHOTO: AP***

In recent years, the international economy has proved surprisingly resilient in the face of shock after shock: the pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, resurgent global inflation and the burdensome interest rates that were imposed by central banks to try to bring price increases back under control. The World Bank now says the global economy grew half a percentage point faster in 2023 than it had predicted back in June and concludes that "the risk of a global recession has receded."

Leading the way in 2023 was the United States, which likely registered 2.5 per cent growth last year 1.4 percentage points faster than the World Bank had expected in mid-year. The World Bank, a 189-country anti-poverty agency, expects US growth to decelerate to 1.6 per cent this year as higher interest rates weaken borrowing and spending.

The Federal Reserve has raised US interest rates 11 times since March 2022. Its strenuous efforts have helped bring US inflation down from the four-decade high it reached in mid-2022 to nearly the Fed's 2 per cent target level. Higher rates are also taming global inflation, which the World Bank foresees sinking from 5.3 per cent last year to 3.7 per cent in 2024 and 3.4 per cent in 2025, though still above pre-pandemic averages. China's economy, the world's second-largest after the United States, is expected to grow 4.5 per cent this year and 4.3 per cent in 2025, down sharply from 5.2 per cent last year. China's economy, for decades a leading engine of global growth, has sputtered in recent years: Its overbuilt property market has imploded.. *—PTI*

Now, Maldives asks China to send more tourists

The appeal comes after Indian tourists cancelled reservations

BEIJING, 9 JAN

Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu on Tuesday appealed to China to "intensify" efforts to send more tourists to his country. This amid a spate of cancellation of reservations by Indian tourists after a diplomatic row erupted over the derogatory remarks by his ministers against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

On the second day of his five-day state visit to China, Muizzu in his address to the Maldives Business Forum in Fujian Province on Tuesday termed China as the island nation's "closest" ally.

"China remains one of our closest allies and development partners," he said.

He praised the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2014, saying that they "delivered the most significant infrastructure projects witnessed in Maldivian history", according to his speech.

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu with First Lady Sajidha Mohamed during their visit to China ***PHOTO: AP***

He urged China to bolster the flow of its tourists to the Maldives.

Also, Maldivian media reported that the two countries have signed a USD 50 million project to develop an integrated tourism zone in the Indian Ocean island. Muizzu's appeal for more Chinese tourists came amid a diplomatic row following the derogatory remarks by some Maldivian ministers against Prime Minister Modi after he posted a video of him on a pristine beach during his recent visit to Lakshadweep.

Muizzu's government suspended three deputy ministers for their derogatory posts on social media.

Also, the Maldives Association of Tourism Industry (MATI) strongly condemned the derogatory comments.

According to data released by the Maldives Tourism Ministry earlier, India has remained the largest tourist market for the country in 2023.

Before Covid, China held the top spot with over 2.80 lakh tourists but is currently struggling to revive its domestic and foreign tourism due to a nearly four-year lockdown policy and the continued slowdown of its economy.

As a result, Chinese tourists who travelled abroad for holidays in millions before Covid are now restricting themselves given the economic slowdown. Regarded as a pro-China politician in the Maldives, Muizzu told the Forum that his administration is focused on diversifying Maldives' economic base and ensuring economic security while continuing to strengthen and drive the tourism industry and boost visitor numbers. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 4&7

PM inaugurates Vibrant Gujarat Global Trade Show

GANDHINAGAR, 9 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday inaugurated the Vibrant Gujarat Global Trade Show 2024 on the eve of the main summit.

The show is an exhibition spread across 2 lakh square metres in multiple halls at the Helipad Ground Exhibition Centre here.

A total of 20 countries are participating in the show, which was inaugurated ahead of the tenth edition of the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit. The summit will also be inaugurated by the prime minister. Modi, who is on a three-day visit to his home state, arrived at the venue at 3pm and undertook a tour of stalls with Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel and other dignitaries.

Modi, UAE President's roadshow; MOUs signed

A bilateral meeting was held between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and United Arab Emirates President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan here on Tuesday where several MoUs were signed. Modi received the UAE President and Ruler of Abu Dhabi at the Ahmedabad airport and the two leaders participated in a roadshow in the evening. Earlier in the day, Modi held bilateral meetings with the President of Timor-Leste Jose Ramos-Horta and Mozambique President Filipe Jacinto Nyusi.

Narendra Modi welcomes Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan
PHOTO: PTI

Modi discusses made-in-India vehicles with CEOs

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday met some of the top global CEOs on the sidelines of the Vibrant Gujarat Summit as he lured investments across sectors to boost the economy and create jobs. *—PTI*

DALITS ENTER K'TAKA TEMPLE AMID SECURITY

CHIKKAMAGALURU, 9 JAN

Dalits on Tuesday entered the Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple in Gollarhatti village, Chikkamagaluru, with police protection.

The temple was closed after a Dalit youth entered the village. The youth was assaulted by the villagers and the temple was closed for the rituals of purification. The taluk administration issued a warning to the temple management of strict action after which the head of the village opened the gates of the temples.

The security was tightened in the area and a Karnataka State Reserve Police squad was also deployed at the spot. On 1 January, Maruthi was attacked by the people of Gollarhatti for entering the village as it was against their religious beliefs. An FIR was registered against 15 people. The victim Maruthi said, "May God do good to those who hit me. Around 30-40 people attacked me with sticks. I don't harbour hatred. They assaulted me because I am a Dalit. Today, I had the opportunity to worship at the same temple, and it was a gratifying experience." *—Salar News*

Lokayukta raids 30 locations in State

BENGALURU, 9 JAN

Lokayukta raided 30 locations across State, targeting government officials from departments such as Public Works, BESCOM, KRIDL and Panchayat and Town Planning on Tuesday.

Significant amounts of cash, including foreign currency, gold jewellery, expensive watches and high-end mobile phones were seized during the operations.

The raids targeted properties associated with a supporter of former Minister ST Somashekar, Channenahalli Gram Panchayat member Suresh, and his friend Ramesh, in Bengaluru South Taluk. Residences of several other government officials from Bengaluru, including the farmhouse, and other properties of Manjesh, a development engineer in Anekal were also raided.

A chunk of the recovery of cash and foreign currency was at the residence of Syed Muneer Ahmad, an Assistant Executive Engineer at Karnataka Rural Infrastructure Development Limited The raids were also conducted on Bescom Chief General Manager ML Nagaraj, who was caught red-handed while allegedly accepting a bribe of Rs 7.5 lakh. The search at Nagaraj's residence unearthed documents about nine sites, three houses, two petrol bunks, educational institutions and farm lands at four locations. *—Salar News*

Rajnath holds talks with UK counterpart

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday met his British counterpart Grant Shapps and held "fruitful discussions" on a wide range of issues related to defence cooperation, security and also on enhancing defence industrial cooperation.

Singh's visit comes after a gap of 22 years, with the last one by an Indian defence minister to the UK dating back to January 2002.

Shapps stressed that the relationship between UK and India is not transactional, instead both countries are natural partners with many commonalities and shared goals, the Indian Ministry of Defence said of the meeting described as "warm" with a fruitful exchange of ideas.

Rajnath Singh with Grant Shapps ***PHOTO: PTI***

Singh noted with appreciation the growing strategic convergence between the two countries, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. The bilateral meeting was followed by the signing of two agreements an MoU on conduct of bilateral international cadet exchange programme, and a Letter of Arrangement between Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and UK's Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) on defence collaboration in research and development. These documents will provide impetus to the people-to-people exchanges particularly among the youth, and larger area of defence research collaboration between the two countries, the ministry noted. *—PTI*

CLASSICAL MUSIC MAGICIAN

Music maestro Rashid Khan no more

KOLKATA, 9 JAN

Ustad Rashid Khan, the celebrated voice that made Hindustani classical music accessible to countless listeners, died at a Kolkata hospital on Tuesday after a four-year battle with prostate cancer.

The classical singer was 55. He is survived by his wife, two sons and a daughter.

Khan, who belongs to the Rampur-Sahaswan Gharana, is the great-grandson of the Gharana founder Inayat Hussain Khan.

He was progressing well under conservative treatment but prolonged stay in hospital resulted in his infection spreading rapidly and complications developed, a doctor of the medical team which treated Khan told reporters.

"I heard about his death. This is a great loss for the entire country and the entire music fraternity. I am in a lot of mental anguish as I still can't believe that Rashid Khan is no more," West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said at the hospital while standing beside his family members.

Rashid Khan battled prostate cancer for four years ***PHOTO: PTI***

He made West Bengal his home, she said about the singer who was born in Uttar Pradesh's Badaun but came to Kolkata with his family in 1980 at the age of 10.

She said Khan will be given a gun salute and state honours at the state-run cultural complex Rabindra Sadan after his body is taken out of a mortuary on January 10.

Banerjee said she and her ministerial colleagues will be present there.

Khan's body will then be taken to his Naktala home and subsequently the Tollygunje cemetery for last rites. The musician was on ventilator support. His health condition deteriorated following a stroke last month. He had been undergoing cancer treatment since 2019. As a pall of gloom descended on the music world after his death, lyricist and screenwriter Prasooj Joshi described Khan as a legend and "a voice through which the divine spoke to us".

"Rashid Khan's demise is an irreparable loss to the world of music. Fortunate are those who heard him perform. He was an unparalleled treasure. Milenge Rashid bhai upar milenge (we will meet in afterlife)," he said. *—PTI*

CEO who killed toddler son attempted suicide after murder

PANAJI, 9 JAN

The chief executive officer of an artificial intelligence start-up attempted suicide after killing her four-year-old son at a service apartment in Goa. She stuffed his body in a bag before taking it to Karnataka in a taxi.

Soon after the crime that took place between 6 and 8 January, the accused Suchana Seth, tried to end her life by cutting her wrist, police said, adding that the motive behind the murder is not known.

Seth was arrested from Chitradurga on Monday and brought to Goa on Tuesday. A court in Mapusa town remanded her in police custody for six days.

The accused and her husband are estranged and their divorce proceedings are currently underway.

Seth's is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of start-up Mindful AI Lab and was among the top '100 Brilliant Women in AI Ethics for 2021'.

"She checked into a service apartment at Candolim in Goa on 6 January along with her son," Calangute police station inspector Paresh Naik said.

After staying there for two days, she informed the staff that she wanted to go to Bengaluru and asked them to arrange for a taxi.

A vehicle was arranged on 8 January in which she left early in the morning. Later, when the apartment staff went to clean the room, they found blood stains on a towel and informed the police, who then reached the spot.

The staff told police that the woman's son was not seen with her when she left the apartment and she was also carrying an unusually heavy bag.

The police then called the accused and enquired with her about the blood stains and her "missing" son.

"The accused told us that the blood stains were due to her monthly periods. She also told us that her son was with her friend in Margao town (in South Goa) and provided the address," the official said.

Naik said when verified they got to know that the address given by her was fake. The inspector later spoke over the phone to the taxi driver, who was on way to Bengaluru and had reached Chitradurga, to take the accused to the nearest police station.

The police in Chitradurga checked the woman's bag in which they found the body of the child. The accused woman hails from West Bengal and has been living in Bengaluru, while her husband is from Kerala. *—PTI*

Peenya flyover to be closed from 16-19 Jan

BENGALURU, 9 JAN

Peenya flyover will be closed from 16-19 January for work on 240 cables. Peenya Traffic Police has ordered the load testing and inspection of the elevated flyover's viaduct repair work. These traffic restrictions were put in place upon the Highways Authority's request and are being carried out by the National Highways Authority to evaluate the structure's integrity. Alternative routes have been recommended for vehicles travelling along Tumakuru Road. Vehicles coming from Nelamangala will be redirected through the highway service road near Kennametal, a tool manufacturer at the 8th mile, via Dasarahalli, Jalahalli Cross, Peenya police station, and the SRS junction.
—Salar News

Gold worth Rs 98.68L seized at Mangaluru airport

MANGALURU, 9 JAN

Customs officials at Mangaluru International Airport (MIA) here have confiscated 1.579 kg of gold worth Rs 98,68,750 from a passenger who arrived from Abu Dhabi.A Customs release on Monday said the passenger arrived at the airport by the Abu Dhabi-Mangaluru Air India Express flight today and they found five oval shaped objects concealed in his rectum. The objects contained gold in paste form weighing 1.579 kg worth Rs 98,68,750.The passenger was arrested and produced before the jurisdictional magistrate, the release added.
—PTI

VHP seeks arrest of M'luru Dvpt Authority Commissioner

MANGALURU, 9 JAN

Durga Vahini, the women's wing of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), on Tuesday demanded the immediate arrest of Mangaluru Urban Development Authority Commissioner Mansoor Ali, who is accused of allegedly harassing a woman staff at his office. In a statement issued here, Swetha Adyapadi, the district convenor of Durga Vahini, also sought the officer's suspension from the post. A protest will be staged before the MUDA office if urgent action is not taken against the accused, she warned. The woman who filed a complaint with the city police Commissioner has stated about the sexual, mental and physical harassment meted out to her by the officer, Adyapadi said. VHP leader Sharan Pumpwell also urged the authorities to initiate appropriate legal action against the official immediately. Based on a complaint from the woman, an outsourced employee working as a typist at MUDA office, police on Sunday registered a case under Sections 354 and 354 A of IPC.
—Salar News

Old commissioner's office to house Police Band Museum

MYSURU, 9 JAN

The old office of the Mysuru City Police Commissioner has been restored to its former grandeur after a renovation and will be inaugurated as the Karnataka Police Band Museum on 22 January. The historic building was renovated for 64 lakhs as it is set to become a tourist attraction. Previously, the building housed the offices of the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) and the City Police Commissioner. During the era of the King, this building served as the repository for police instruments and equipment. Subsequently, the instruments of the police band were shifted to the Mount Police building. Now, with the completion of the renovation work, the historic structure will be fully converted into a band house and museum, drawing tourists. *—Salar News*

K'taka won't have 3 DyCMs: Kharge

He says focus must be on solving problems

BENGALURU, 9 JAN

Mallikarjun Kharge said there will be a meeting on 10 January over selection of candidates for Lok Sabha polls ***PHOTO: ANI***

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday clarified that there will not be any more Deputy Chief Minister posts in the State and said that there was no proposal before the high command in this regard.

Attending a press conference he said, "There is no proposal, such as the creation of three DCM posts before the high command. You (media) can ask Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar in this regard," he said.

"The development of the creation of more DCM posts in Karnataka is just a speculation. The focus should be on governance and solving problems. The attention has to be on the implementation of guarantee schemes until the goal is reached," Kharge said.

He said that there will be a meeting on 10 January over the selection of candidates for the Lok Sabha elections from Karnataka and discussion will be held on fielding candidates," he added. Minister for Social Welfare Dr HC Mahadevappa, a prominent Dalit leader from Mysuru and close associate of Siddaramaiah said that there was nothing wrong in placing the demand for more posts of DyCMs. "Those who deserve it and have experience can stake a claim for it. It's about capacity and experience," he said.

Mass leader from north Karnataka and Minister for PWD, Satish Jarkiholi has already placed the demand for three DCM posts before the high command during his trip to New Delhi.

Kharge slams Prime Minister on foreign policy

Kharge said Prime Minister Narendra Modi takes everything is exercising his authority freely regarding the foreign bill. He made this remark while addressing the press on Tuesday in response to questions about the ongoing issues in the Maldives.

Kharge said, "After Narendra Modi came to power, he is taking everything personally. At the international level, we should keep a good relationship with our neighbours. We should act according to time. We cannot change our neighbours..." news agency ANI quoted.

"However tough the circumstances, we must be ready to face any challenge. We need to tackle the struggle just like how the late prime minister Indira Gandhi separated Bangladesh from Pakistan," He said. Kharge mentioned, "We can't Change the mentality of the people who are around us, we have to be united and we need to move ahead." *—Salar News*

City grapples with water scarcity

VISHAL MAYUR
BENGALURU, 9 JAN

Over the past month, key areas in the City such as KR Puram, Sarjapura, Chamrajpet and Malleswaram have been grappling with severe water shortage. Residents claim that they are experiencing a week-long delay in the Cauvery water supply, which was previously supplied every alternate day.

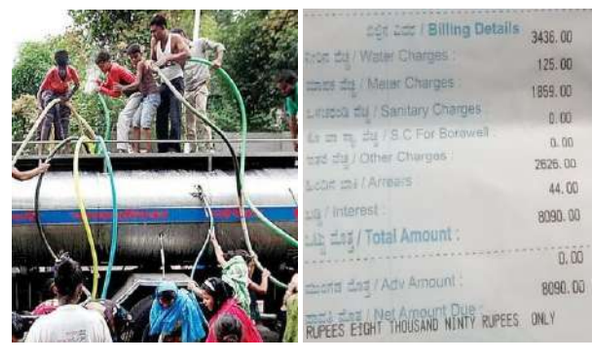
Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) received 10,491 complaints of water scarcity in December, 2023, and 2,387 just between 1 and 6 January.

Bengalureans claim that there is a six to seven days' delay in supply, and in some places it stretches up to 15 days.

The water shortage is due to a lack of adequate rainfall that has led to decreased levels in the Cauvery river and Mysuru's Krishna Raja Sagar (KRS) Dam. "Bengaluru gets 1,450 million litres of Cauvery water per day from KRS Dam, but in the past month the City has just received 1,110 million litres per day," said Vinay Kumar, BWSSB Assistant Executive Engineer.

The water shortage has forced the residents to turn to water tankers. With the surge in demand, the tankers are now charging a lot more.

Umar Faruq, the owner of Kaveri Tank supply vehicle told Salar News, "Previously, 4,000 litres of water costed Rs 500 but now it is Rs 650. For 6,000 litres, the charge has risen to around Rs 900 from the earlier Rs 800."



Residents are forced to hire water tankers; a PG owner paid water bill of Rs 8,000 instead of the usual Rs 2,600 ***PHOTO: SALAR***

Hike in water bills too

Along with scarcity, Seshadripuram and Guttahalli residents are forced to pay higher Cauvery water bills too.

Dhananjay Gowda, a resident from Seshadripuram, alleged that while his water consumption remained consistent, the monthly bill surged from Rs 600 to Rs 800.

Bharat S, the owner of a men's PG from Seshadripuram 2nd Cross said that in November 2023 he received a water bill of Rs 2,626 but in December he was charged Rs 8,090 (in pic).

Parvathi Ramesh, also from the area, said she paid Rs 536 in November but Rs 1,532 in December. "What will citizens do if these prices keep increasing? The government is exploiting loopholes by imposing taxes on people through the water bill."

While Below Poverty Line (BPL) cardholders get Cauvery water for free, those living in the slums of Srirampura are left waiting for water. "We don't receive the water bill as it is waived off, but we are experiencing water scarcity. In November, water used to come every alternate day, but since December, water is supplied only once a week," Rajesh HN told Salar News. *—Salar News*

BJP says Cong not giving drought relief, meets Guv

BENGALURU, 9 JAN

The leader of the Opposition, R Ashoka, challenged Congress to distribute the drought relief to the farmers immediately or to resign from their respective positions.

Ashoka met Governor Thawarchand Gehlot to explain the failure of the Congress government in distributing the drought funds to the farmers. Speaking to the reporters after the meeting, Ashoka said, "We met the Governor to explain to him the irresponsibility of Congress government. Around 600 farmers have committed suicide, and the government does not care about it, neither the officials nor the minister have visited the farmers."

BJP leader claimed that significant migration has been taking place in North Karnataka due to the drought and water shortage. He said, "It has been five months since the drought started, and the government has not given any compensation. Migration has started in North Karnataka. It has been almost two months since Siddaramaiah said that he would give the farmers a drought compensation of Rs 2000. So far, the money has not reached any of them." *—Salar News*

'Fruit & flower show' moved from Sirsi to Karwar

KARWAR, 9 JAN

PHOTO: SALAR

Sirsi, which has annually held its famous 'fruit and flower show' for over a decade, will not be able to do so this year as it is grappling with drought. This has led to a change of venue to Karwar. The coastal town, which is 104.4 km away from Sirsi, will host the district-level show.

Every year in February, the Horticulture Department hosts the show in Sirsi along with popular events such as Marikamba Devi Jatra and Beda Vesha in March. The flower show was also held during the Covid pandemic.

An initial grant of Rs 7 lakh has been sanctioned for the show's first phase, and preparations are underway. The challenge now is to cultivate these plants quickly and preserve the flowers until the show as they will be exposed to intense sunlight. *—Salar News*

Gadag: Yash's fan dies after crashing into actor's convoy

GADAG, 9 JAN

PHOTO: SALAR

- The deceased is Nikhil Gowda, 22, a student of engineering, had come to see Yash

A fan of actor Yash, who suffered a head injury after colliding with his convoy vehicle, succumbed to injuries on Tuesday. The death toll in the tragedies while celebrating Yash's birthday has risen to four.

The deceased is Nikhil Gowda, 22, a resident of Kinkadakatti village in Gadag. Nikhil, a student of engineering, had come to see Yash. Nikhil was following Yash on a scooter while he was returning to the airport. He had collided with the police convoy vehicle and suffered severe head injuries.

The incident took place on Mulugunda Road.

Earlier, three people were killed and three others were injured after they were electrocuted while erecting a huge cut-out of Yash to celebrate his birthday on Monday. As it was pitch dark, the victims were unable to see the high-tension electric wire.

The incident took place in Soranagi village near Lakshmeshwar town in Gadag. Yash visited the families of the deceased.

He also visited the three other people who were injured. "I don't like the erection of banners, and cut-outs, and I don't like to show off with my fan base. I started fearing my birthdays as one or the other tragedies occurred. Let the fans bless me from wherever they are. They should take utmost care of themselves and achieve big in life," Yash said.
—Salar News

Simmha hits back at Yathindra over national leader remark

MYSURU, 9 JAN

PHOTO: SALAR

BJP MP Pratap Simmha on Tuesday said that he considers himself an ordinary MP and is dedicated to working for ordinary citizens. The BJP MP was responding to former Congress MLA Yathindra Siddaramaiah's allegations that he sees himself as a national leader.

Addressing the media during a meeting with university officials over Mysuru Ring Road's cleanliness, Simmha said he is a dedicated public servant.

Hitting back, Simmha questioned the government lab contract that Yathindra's company received and his involvement in getting the BDA site.

"These actions are characteristic of national leaders which are portrayed by Yathindra not me," he said. "I am not the leader who sends a list of officers to their father and instructs him to transfer them," he said. Yathindra is the son of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

Simmha also questioned Congress' devotion to Lord Rama. He also dismissed claims that BJP is using rice from Anna Bhagya scheme for akshate (turmeric-laced rice grains) that is given to City residents along with the Ram Temple invitation.
—Salar News

Firms growing rubber, tea & coffee owe govt ₹2K cr

BENGALURU, 9 JAN

- By taking 1,074 acres on a lease, Mercera Rubber Limited has to pay Rs 454 crore to the department

Tata Coffee Limited is among a host of private companies growing rubber, tea and coffee in State that owes Forest Department a total of Rs 2,000 crore in land lease and interest amount, said Forest and Wildlife Minister Eshwar Khandre on Tuesday.

The highest defaulter among the companies located across Kodagu district and nearby areas was Portland Rubber Estate Limited, the minister said on Tuesday. The company leased over 1,288 acres and has pending dues of Rs 536.66 crore as of 2022. Following this, the joint venture of Glenn Lauren Plantation Private and Tata Coffee Limited has taken a lease of 943 acres of forest land and owes the government Rs 524 crores.

By taking 1,074 acres on a lease, Mercera Rubber Limited has to pay Rs 454 crore to the department. Chamarajanagara Honnamatti Neelgiri Plantation Limited and others have to pay the government Rs 25.36 crore.

Thomson Rubber India Limited, occupying 625 acres of leased lands, has a pending account of Rs 91.29 crore. Additionally, the company pledged the leased land in the bank to take a loan. The company failed to pay back the bank and the land was auctioned. However, the company brought back the land, the forest minister said.

Khandre said a team will be formed under the leadership of BP Ravi, Principal Secretary of Forest Department, comprising officers holding the posts of Principal Chief Conservator of Forest and Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forest to recover the dues.

When the department served notices to these companies, the companies filed cases in High Court. Many such cases are pending in the court, Khandre said. The initial order against the defaulters was passed in 1999 by Ravi but none of the governments that came to power followed the order.

Khandre said Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has told him that the money recovered from the Forest Department will be allocated for the development of forests and wildlife of the State. Khandre also said from 16 January, the people owning the wildlife artefacts can submit them to the department within a timeline of three months.
—Salar News

STOP GOING TO TEMPLES THAT DON'T LET YOU IN: SIDDARAMAIAH

BENGALURU, 9 JAN

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday said that people should stop going to those temples which do not allow them inside. Speaking at a book release programme organised by Savita Samaj at Gandhi Bhavan Siddaramaiah said, "Social reformer from Kerala Narayana Guru had asked people to stop going to temples where they are not allowed. You build your own temple and start worshipping. Until the end, I will carry forward the politics of self-respect and social justice. All our programmes will be poor-centric. Our programmes have reached houses. I won't value the criticism by the BJP. The people are with me." He said in the name of religion and caste people should not hate Muslims, Dalits, Shudras and the labour class. 'It is utter inhuman and ugly,' he added. He asked people to work dignity. "Mutual respect among humans is the biggest virtue. It is not correct to argue that God is only present in temples. God is everywhere," he said. *—Salar News*

WARNING ISSUED

Minister said on-going project has successfully increased groundwater levels, enabling agricultural use through borewells ***PHOTO: X***

Do not use treated water for agri purpose: Minister

BENGALURU, 9 JAN

Karnataka Minor Irrigation Minister NS Boseraju on Tuesday warned of stringent action against individuals directly utilising treated water from the HN Valley and KC Valley irrigation projects for agriculture purposes.

The Lift Irrigation Scheme, a vital component of these valleys, channels treated water to districts like Bengaluru Rural, Kolar and Chikkaballapura, ultimately replenishing lakes to elevate groundwater levels.

The on-going project has successfully increased groundwater levels, enabling agricultural use through borewells, according to the Minister.

Boseraju expressed concern over instances where second-stage treated water is being directly employed for agriculture, contravening project guidelines, a statement issued by the Minister's office said.

"While acknowledging the high quality of treated water, the Minister cautioned against its direct use, emphasising the need to preserve the project's primary objectives. Authorities have been directed to take robust action against those violating the directive," the statement read.

Boseraju directed the officials to conduct regular inspections, preventing the direct use of treated water.

Individuals found violating the rule will face the consequences, the Minister said, adding that the officials failing to take necessary action will also be held accountable.

"This directive aims to safeguard the integrity of the irrigation projects, ensuring their effectiveness in raising groundwater levels and promoting sustainable water use in the designated districts," the statement said. *—PTI*

IN THE MOOD FOR FOOD

Avarebele Mela offers a culinary treat to foodies

BENGALURU, 9 JAN

The festival celebrates the bean's journey from the farm to the plate ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Bengaluru's food lovers had their taste buds in overdrive on the last day of the Avarebele Mela, an annual food festival organised by Sree Vasavi Condiments, on Tuesday. The National College grounds transformed into a foodie's paradise, drawing crowds from every nook and corner of the City.

Celebrating the journey of the winter vegetable from the farm to the plate, the mela showcased the versatility of Avarekai (beans) by offering it in a melange of dishes. Avarekai, a winter vegetable, is an essential ingredient in Karnataka's culinary scene. Every part of Avarekai, including leaves, flowers and pods, is edible and rich in nutrition.

Drawing inspiration from the success of Kadlekai Parishe in South Bengaluru, the Avarebele Mela has grown exponentially since its inception in the early 2000s. What started with a modest 10 stalls has now blossomed into a sprawling festival with over 40 stalls! And the menu? Oh, it's a fusion fiesta! From traditional South Indian delights like idli, dosa, and rasam to avant-garde creations like Avarebele-infused Pav Bhaji and Chow Mein, there's something for everyone.

This year's highlight? A heartfelt homage to the late Kannada legend, Puneeth Rajkumar, with a special dessert named 'Appu Special'. And the dessert brigade didn't stop there! Avarebele holige, jalebi, ice cream, and more, tantalised taste buds and stole the show.

The festival aligns with the Avarekai cultivation season and celebrates the bean's journey from the farm to the plate.

M Vishwanath's stall selling Avarebele Masala Vade and Hithkabele Bonda was the talk of this year's festival. "We have been serving here for over 20 years now," Vishwanath told Salar News. "We have been trying varieties of dishes out of Avarekai. From our experiments, we found that Avarebele vade and bonda sell the most and later we decided to serve only these."

For regulars like Ankitha Dhananjay, the Avarebele Crispy Bean was the star. So enamoured was she that a whopping 4kg made its way into her evening plans! "A culinary masterpiece," she exclaimed, drawing envious glances and inquiries from fellow food enthusiasts.

Avarebele Mela stands as a testament to the City's vibrant food culture, bringing together people from far and wide to indulge in the delicious flavours and unique offerings the festival has become known for over the years.
—Salar News

AAP ready for poll alliance with Cong in 5 states

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has kept its stand on contesting in an alliance with Congress in five states, including Punjab, and the discussion has so far been positive, party's Delhi convener Gopal Rai said on Tuesday. AAP and Congress are part of the INDIA bloc and held discussions on Monday to discuss seat-sharing for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. "The (seat-sharing) talks have begun between the two parties. We kept our stand on contesting in an alliance in Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Goa and Gujarat. Till now, there has been positive discussions," he said on the sidelines of a press conference. When asked about the seats the party is willing to contest, the AAP leader said that there was "no discussion" on specific seats in these states. AAP is in power in Delhi and Punjab. The Congress units in both the states are opposed to any truck with the AAP. *—PTI*

Parliament breach: 5 accused taken to Gujarat

GUJARAT, 9 JAN

Five of the six accused in the Parliament security breach case have been taken to Gujarat for the polygraph and narco-analysis tests, the police said on Monday. The five accused are Sagar Sharma, Manoranjan D, Amol Shinde, Lalit Jha and Mahesh Kumawat, they said. The police officials said all the five accused will have to undergo the polygraph test, while Sagar and Manoranjan will have to undergo additional naro-analysis and brain mapping tests. "The tests will be conducted at the Forensic Science Laboratory in Gandhinagar," said a police officer. Neelam Azad, the sixth accused, did not give her consent for the test before a court in Delhi on Friday. The Delhi police had earlier moved the court seeking permission to conduct the polygraph test of all the accused. The police had informed the court that an expert has recommended Sagar and Manoranjan for narco-analysis and brain mapping after conducting a psycho-analysis test on them. *—PTI*

Smriti Irani attends Haj and Umrah conference in Saudi

JEDDAH, 9 JAN

Union Minister for Minority Affairs Smriti Irani on Tuesday attended the inaugural session of the third Haj and Umrah Conference here and discussed with Deputy Governor of Makkah Region and Minister of Haj and Umrah the scope for further close cooperation to improve facilities and services for the Indian pilgrims. Irani, also serving as the Union Minister for Women and Child Development, was accompanied by Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan. The session provided valuable insights on the best global practices and facilitated the exchange of ideas and information which would prove useful in improving the Haj experience for Indian pilgrims, a statement from the Ministry of Minority Affairs said. "Discussion also held with Deputy Governor of Makkah Region and Minister of Haj and Umrah, KSA, on the scope for further close cooperation to improve facilities and services for Indian pilgrims during Haj 2024," the statement said. *—PTI*

Secretariat March violence: Youth Cong Prez held

T'PURAM, 9 JAN

Youth Congress Kerala state President Rahul Mamkootathil has been taken into custody by the police in connection with the recent violent protest during the Secretariat March organised by the outfit last month, police sources said here on Tuesday.Thiruvananthapuram Cantonment police took him into custody from his residence in Pathanamthitta district in the early hours of Tuesday, they said. The protest was organised to highlight alleged atrocities against Youth Congress workers in the state. *—PTI*

Sena UBT moves SC over CM-Speaker meet

They met before verdict on disqualification of Sena MLAs

MUMBAI, 9 JAN

The affidavit before the SC was filed on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

- Narwekar said Thackeray, a former chief minister, should know for what purposes a speaker could meet a Chief Minister

The Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Uddhav Thackeray on Tuesday said his party has filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court objecting to a meeting between Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar before the verdict on disqualification petitions against Sena MLAs including Shinde.

Narkwekar is scheduled to deliver his ruling at 4 pm on 10 January. "If the judge (Narwekar) is going to meet the accused, what should we expect from that judge," Thackeray asked, speaking to the media at his residence 'Matoshree' here.

The affidavit before the SC was filed on Monday, he said. Thackeray's ally and Nationalist Congress Party President Sharad Pawar too said that when someone who is hearing a case meets the person against whom the case is being heard, it "leaves room for doubt".

Hitting back, Narwekar said Thackeray, a former Chief Minister, should know for what purposes a speaker could meet a chief minister. "If he still levels such allegations, then his motive is very clear. There is no rule that a speaker, while hearing disqualification pleas, cannot do any other work," Narwekar said.

The speaker met Shinde at 'Varsha', the Chief Minister's official residence here, on Sunday. Uddhav Thackeray noted that the two had met in October last year too. Narwekar's ruling will decide whether "democracy exists in the country or not" or whether the two (speaker and chief minister) will "murder" democracy, he said.

"We have filed an affidavit asking whether there is collusion between the judge and the accused," Thackeray said, asking whether there would be further delay by the speaker in giving the ruling. Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Anil Parab said such meetings must be brought to the Supreme Court's notice as it was a serious issue.

"We hope the apex court takes this matter seriously," Parab added. Thackeray said the speaker never goes to meet the chief minister. It is the speaker who summons the latter, he added. In June 2022, Shinde and dozens of other Shiv Sena MLAs rebelled against then chief minister Uddhav Thackeray, leading to a split in the Sena and fall of the Maha Vikas Aghadi coalition government.

The Thackeray and Shinde factions then filed petitions against each other's legislators, seeking disqualification under the anti-defection law. The apex court in May last year had directed speaker Narwekar to give his decision expeditiously. *—PTI*

ED director to review probe in Kolkata

KOLKATA, 9 JAN

In-charge ED Director Rahul Navin will review the probe into the alleged public distribution and paddy procurement scam and discuss security concerns of the local ED establishment in the backdrop of the attacks on the search teams of the central probe agency in West Bengal, official sources said Tuesday.

Navin visited the agency's office at CGO complex in Salt Lake area just before noon for a meeting with his officials. The director was provided an armed escort of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).

An officer of the probe agency told PTI that "The head of the ED will chair a meeting regarding the attack. Discussions will also be held on the progress of others investigations".

The ED Chief, who landed here midnight, is also expected to meet the injured officials along with senior officials of the agency's Kolkata-based regional office on Tuesday, the sources said.

Three ED officials were injured and their mobiles, laptops and wallets were "looted" when they reached Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district. *—PTI*

R'than to probe corruption during Cong's regime: CM

JAIPUR, 9 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma on Tuesday said his government will probe the alleged corruption that took place during the tenure of the previous Congress regime and get the culprits punished.

Addressing the "Viksit Bharat Sankalp Bharat" camp in Udaipur, Sharma said, "The previous government had given protection (to those involved) in the cases of corruption. The corruption they have done or the corruption that has happened through them- we will get that investigated and if anyone is found guilty, our government will also get him punished."

He said the "fraud" going on in the name of Indira Rasoi has been stopped and Shri Anna (millets) has been included in the scheme. Earlier, 450 grams of grains were given on the plate under the scheme, Sharma said, adding that his government has increased the amount to 600 grams for the same price.

He said the previous BJP regime in Rajasthan, led by Vasundhara Raje, had launched the Annapurna Rasoi scheme and set up such facilities at hospitals, railway stations and bus stands for the common man, but the subsequent Congress changed the name of the scheme to Indira Rasoi and raised bogus payments.

The chief minister also said the government has formed a special investigation team (SIT) to probe the paper leak case and those involved are being arrested every day.

"We also want to assure you that our government will not spare such people because they have betrayed youngsters," he said. Sharma said during the tenure of the present BJP government in the desert state, the first competitive examination was conducted peacefully two days ago. *—PTI*

Modi holds bilateral meet with Timor-Leste President

GANDHINAGAR, 9 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a bilateral meeting with President of Timor-Leste Jose Ramos-Horta here on Tuesday with the discussions covering cooperation in various fields including health, traditional medicine, energy, IT, fintech and capacity building, an MEA official said.

Modi reached Ahmedabad on Monday night.

On Tuesday morning, he reached the Mahatma Mandir Convention and Exhibition Centre in Gandhinagar to hold bilateral meetings with world leaders, a day before the inauguration of the 10th edition of Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit.

"Had an excellent meeting with President @JoseRamosHorta1 of Timor-Leste. The fact that our meeting is taking place in Mahatma Mandir, Gandhinagar, makes this meeting even more special considering Gandhi Ji's influence on President Horta's life and work. We discussed ways to further bilateral and cultural ties between our nations," Modi said in a post on X after the meeting."Furthering the Delhi-Dili connect! PM @narendramodi held a productive meeting with President @JoseRamosHorta1 of Timor-Leste in Gandhinagar," Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on X.Modi congratulated President Horta for Timor-Leste's upcoming membership of the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), he said. *—PTI*

Ram Mandir inauguration 'gimmick show': Mamata

JOYNAGAR, 9 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday alleged that the BJP was indulging in a "gimmick show" through the inauguration of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.

The TMC supremo asserted that "she does not support festivities that exclude other communities".

Addressing a public programme at Joynagar in South 24 Parganas district, Banerjee said she does not believe in dividing masses on religious lines.

"Yesterday I was asked to comment on Ram Mandir in Ayodhya as if I have nothing else to do. I said that religion belongs to individuals but festivals are for all," she said.

Banerjee, also the Trinamool Congress supremo, said she believes in festivities that take along people from all communities and speak about unity.

"The BJP is doing it (Ram Mandir inauguration) under court's instruction but doing it as a gimmick show before the Lok Sabha polls... I don't believe in dividing people on religious lines," she said.

The Chief Minister claimed that the government of India is a government run by agencies," Banerjee said.

Banerjee described West Bengal as a land of peace.

"Remember, I will never allow a division between Hindu-Muslim, Sikh-Christian and tribals. Bengal is a land of peace and there is no place to do divisive politics" she said. . *—PTI*

Over 500 influencers to undertake yatra

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

More than 500 social media influencers are set to undertake a month-long 4,500-km yatra tracing the route taken by Lord Ram to return to his kingdom in Ayodhya from Tamil Nadu's Rameshwaram after his exile.

According to organisers of the Ramotsav Yatra, it will cover five states- Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

Apurva Singh, who is part of the Ramotsav Yatra team, told PTI on Tuesday that the month-long yatra will start from Indore in Madhya Pradesh on 14 January.

"Over 500 influencers, Instagrammers, YouTubers, bloggers, sports and Bollywood celebrities will participate in the yatra," Malay Dixit, another key member of the organising team, told PTI. The event is being organised by the Ram Mahotsav Yatra Samiti formed by the All India Influencers Association, he said.

This comes in the run-up to the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya on 22 January.

"This journey of ours is not only didactic but also a celebration of the journey of Lord Shri Ram through forests which will introduce us to Indian cultural heritage," Dixit said.

"We will also get an opportunity to emulate the real forest journey of Lord Shri Ram during the yatra and document it," he added. On their way to Ayodhya, those participating in the yatra will collect soil from key locations to plant saplings in Ayodhya that will be named 'Ramayan'. *—PTI*

- It will cover five states- Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh

Words on Tharoor misinterpreted, BJP will win in T'puram: O Rajgopal

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 9 DEC

BJP leader O Rajagopal and Congress leader Shashi Tharoor **PTI**

Hours after he praised MP Shashi Tharoor and said it would be difficult to defeat the Congress leader from the state capital in the near future, veteran BJP leader O Rajagopal clarified that his words were misinterpreted and claimed the saffron party will win from the Thiruvananthapuram constituency in the Lok Sabha polls.

Rajagopal, former union minister who lost to Tharoor in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections from Thiruvananthapuram, had at a function here on Monday evening said the Congress MP's ability to sway people's minds was the reason for his repeated wins from the constituency.

"That is why he is able to win again and again from Thiruvananthapuram. I doubt that anyone else will get an opportunity to win (from Thiruvananthapuram) in the near future," he had said while speaking at the N Ramachandran Foundation award ceremony. Tharoor had touched Rajagopal's feet and hugged him after his speech. However, hours later, in a late night Facebook post, the veteran BJP leader said that his comments were in the context of Tharoor having won more than once from the Thiruvananthapuram Lok Sabha constituency.

Tharoor defends DKS, says he talked about his support for other religions

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor backed Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Tuesday regarding his remarks about the Karnataka government celebrating the consecration of the Ram temple at Ayodhya across the state.

Reacting to a query on Shivakumar's statement on Monday, in which he defended his government's decision to celebrate the consecration ceremony of the Ram Temple on 22 January , saying "ultimately we are all Hindus," Tharoor said the Karnataka leader also expressed his respect for all religions.

Talking to PTI on the sidelines of a function here, the Congress Working Committee (CWC) member said: "We respect everyone's right to worship as you see fit, and that remains the Congress position."

He said the Congress party as such was not invited to the consecration ceremony but only three individual leaders of the party were given non-transferable invitations.

"They have announced that the invitations are for the named individuals only. And therefore it is not a party invitation. So it is for the named individuals to make a decision (on whether to participate in the function or not). Let us leave them the right to make their own decisions," Tharoor said. *—PTI*

ED files chargesheet against Lalu's family

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

Lalu Prasad Yadav **PHOTO: PTI**

- Katyal was arrested in this case by the ED in November last year while Lalu Prasad Yadav was summoned by the agency

The Enforcement Directorate on Tuesday filed its first charge sheet in the railways land-for-jobs linked money laundering case, naming as accused RJD Chief Lalu Prasad Yadav's wife and former Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi and their MP daughter Misa Bharti among others, official sources said.

Yadav's another daughter Hema Yadav ,40, an alleged "close associate" of the Yadav family Amit Katyal,49, railway employee and alleged beneficiary Hridayanand Chaudhary, two firms AK Infosystems Pvt. Ltd. and AB Exports Pvt. Ltd., through their common director Shariqul Bari, have also been named in the charge sheet.

The complaint, with over 4,700 pages including annexures, has arrayed seven accused. It was filed before a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Delhi that has listed the matter for January 16, the sources said.

Special Judge Vishal Gogne directed the ED to file an e-copy of the charge sheet and documents today itself.

Katyal was arrested in this case by the ED in November last year while Lalu Prasad Yadav was summoned by the agency but is yet to depose. However, his son and Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav had deposed once before the agency. He has been asked to appear again before it. *—PTI*

Anurag takes dig at Opposition INDIA bloc

MUMBAI, JAN 9 (PTI)

As the INDIA bloc juggled with seat-sharing among its constituents, Union Minister Anurag Thakur on Tuesday took a dig at the opposition alliance, saying the differences among its members shows that they do not have a leader who can take everyone along.

Talking to reporters here, Thakur said people were not even looking at the alliance because of their inability to take decisions. *—PTI*

MAJOR BACKLASH

Black flag protest against Ker Guv amidst LDF's hartal

IDUKKI, 9 JAN

Arif Mohammed Khan faced a massive protest from various youth outfits affiliated to the ruling Left Democratic Front **PHOTO: PTI**

Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan faced a massive protest from various youth outfits affiliated to the ruling Left Democratic Front during his visit to Thodupuzha in Idukki district on Tuesday.

Khan arrived in Thodupuzha amidst a hartal called by the LDF in Idukki district against his refusal to give assent to the Kerala Government Land Assignment (Amendment) Bill 2023.

As the Governor entered the hill district to participate in a function organised by the Kerala Vyapari Vyavasayi Ekopana Samiti, a traders' body, a group of Left activists attempted to obstruct his vehicle, displaying black flags as a mark of protest.

The protests, spearheaded by activists from the Left Front's youth outfits including Students Federation of India (SFI), Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI) and Youth Front, gained momentum as they marched towards the venue where the Governor was scheduled to attend the programme.Earlier, local leaders and activists of the CPI(M)'s Idukki unit took out a march against Khan's arrival to the district. Some of the protesters even allegedly raised objectionable slogans against Khan during the march. Meanwhile, addressing the gathering after inaugurating the Karunya Family Welfare Scheme of the Samithi, the Governor said he would fulfil his constitutional obligations and would perform whatever duties he has.Amidst an intense tussle between Khan and the CPI (M)-led government over various issues, including the non-signing of certain bills passed by the Assembly, the Governor emphasised that he is a public servant, not a rubber stamp."I am not a rubber stamp. I have said repeatedly... I have a duty to uphold the constitutional law. I have a duty to see the interest and welfare of the people of Kerala is not compromised by anyone," the Governor said.Khan further asserted that the interests and welfare of the ordinary people of Kerala would be his uppermost priority while discharging his duties."But on one thing, there is no question of any compromise, and that is, law and rules will not be allowed to be bent to serve the interests of particular individuals who belong to certain political dispensations. That cannot be allowed," he said. *—PTI*

2 kids die of asphyxiation due to coal fire in UP

LAKHIMPUR KHERI, 9 JAN

Two children were killed and their parents hospitalised due to asphyxia caused by a coal fire lit in their room to beat the cold while they slept, police here said on Tuesday. The incident occurred in Mailani town on Monday, they said, adding that the room had no ventilation. The victims are Ramesh Vishwakarma, his wife Renu, daughter Anshika, 8, and son Krishna, 7. Ramesh's sister-in-law Uma Devi knocked on his door Tuesday but got no response, following which the door was broken down and all four were found unconscious. They were rushed to the Mailani health centre, where Anshika and Krishna were declared dead, while Ramesh and Renu were taken to the Kheri district hospital. Mailani police station in-charge Pankaj Tripathi said the bodies were sent for a post-mortem examination.*—PTI*

Vehicles torched by suspected Maoists near Jharkhand

GUMLA, 9 JAN

Suspected Maoists set ablaze several vehicles parked near a bauxite mine in Gumla district, police said on Tuesday. The incident took place on Monday night, when seven vehicles, including dumpers and trucks, were torched near the Serangdag bauxite mine in Ghagra community development (CD) block, a senior police officer said. "A search operation has been launched to nab the miscreants, who are believed to be members of a Maoist outfit," he said. The demand for 'levy' (extortion) is likely to be the reason behind the act, the officer said. Security has been bolstered in the area following the incident. *—PTI*

4 booked for holding tribal man captive, assaulting

PALGHAR, 9 JAN

The police on Tuesday registered an offence against four people for allegedly holding a tribal man from Maharashtra's Palghar district captive and beating him up. Based on a complaint, a first information report (FIR) has been registered under relevant provisions of the Indian Penal Code, Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, and Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act at Koregaon police station in Satara, the official said.The case has been registered against four persons, including the supervisor of a sugar factory but no arrests have been made so far, the official said.As per the complaint, the victim, Krishna Nagde, 40, worked as a labourer at sugar factories in Satara. Workers were allegedly not paid extra when they worked at various sugar factories between 10 October, 2023 and 8 January, and some of them escaped, he said. The accused suspected Nagde of provoking the workers to escape and they allegedly held him captive and beat him up, the official said.

190 tents set up in Delhi to shelter homeless from cold

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

Amid a dip in the mercury in the national capital, the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board has set up 190 tents across the city to house the homeless at night, a DUSIB official said on Tuesday. These tents can accommodate approximately 8,000 people. Around 60 tents have been kept as standby and will be used as per requirement, Member Expert, DUSIB, Bipin Rai told PTI. Delhi on Monday recorded its coldest day of the month so far as the minimum temperature dropped to 5.3 degrees Celsius, two notches below the season's average and almost the same as the hill station of Nainital, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). The DUSIB began shifting homeless people to temporary tent shelters set up as part of the city government's winter action plan in December 2023.*—PTI*

Maldives goes into damage control mode

Maldives' tourism body condemned the remarks against PM

MALE, 9 JAN

Over 2,09,198 Indians visited Maldives in 2023 ***PHOTO: TOURISM MINISTRY, REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES***

Maldives's top tourism body has condemned the derogatory comments made by some deputy ministers of the country against India and Prime Minister Modi after he visited Lakshadweep.

"India has also been a consistent and significant contributor to the Tourism Industry of the Maldives. A contributor that has greatly assisted our recovery efforts during Covid-19, right after we re-opened our borders, since then, India has continued to remain as one of the top markets for the Maldives," i Maldives Association of Tourism Industry (MATI) said.

According to the Maldives Tourism Ministry statistics, over 17 lakh tourists visited the island nation in 2023, out of which more than 2,09,198 visitors were Indians followed by Russians (2,09,146) and China (1,87,118).

The number of Indian visitors was more than 2.4 lakh in 2022 while over 2.11 lakh Indians flew to the Maldives in 2021. The Maldives was also one of the few countries open for international tourists during the pandemic and nearly 63,000 Indians visited that country during that period. Soon after the remarks against Modi went viral, hundreds of social media users, including celebrities, protested with calls to boycott tourism in Maldives and instead explore domestic destinations. Several social media users and even some travel companies claimed Indians are cancelling their scheduled trip to the Maldives following the diplomatic row. Expressing sincere wish that the close relationship between the two nations "endures for generations to come," the Association hoped "and as such, we refrain from actions or speech that may have any negative impact on our good relationship." Earlier, the Maldivian government had on Sunday suspended the three deputy ministers, and followed it up on Monday by informing India's High Commissioner Munu Muhawar that the derogatory remarks made by those three do not represent views and reaffirmed Maldives' continued support for neighbour. *—PTI*

80% BUSES ON ROAD DESPITE STRIKE IN TN

CHENNAI, 9 JAN

About 80 per cent of buses in Tamil Nadu were being operated on Tuesday amid the strike call given by various transport unions, including those affiliated to the CPI(M) and AIADMK.

The state government buses were operated in several parts including Chennai, Madurai, Coimbatore and Kanyakumari districts, benefiting the commuters.

In Chennai, the Metropolitan Transport Corporation (MTC) authorities ensured the buses were operated as usual and that the strike did not impact the public much. The trade unions had announced the strike demanding implementation of a "six point charter of demands." It includes initiation of talks for enhanced wages (15th wage revision pact), filling vacant posts, and release of pending Dearness Allowance for those in service and retired workers.Transport Minister SS Sivasankar earlier said the demands will be met in due course when the financial situation improves.

Trade union affiliated to the ruling DMK, the Labour Progressive Federation (LPF) is not a part of the strike. AIADMK's Anna Thozhirsanga Peravai (ATP) and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) participated in the strike. ***—PTI***

HR head turns approver in NewsClick case

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

Amit Chakravarty ***PHOTO: PTI***

- This could spell trouble for NewsClick's Editor-in-Chief and Founder Prabir Purkayastha.

A Delhi court has allowed NewsClick's human resources department Chief Amit Chakravarty to turn an approver in the case lodged against the news portal under anti-terror law UAPA. The case was filed over allegations that it received money to spread pro-China propaganda.

Special Judge Hardeep Kaur pardoned Chakravarty, arrested in the case, on an application he moved recently seeking the court's permission to turn an approver, a move that could spell trouble for NewsClick's Editor-in-Chief and Founder Prabir Purkayastha.

Chakravarty also claimed he was in possession of "material information" about the case which he was willing to disclose to the Delhi Police.

The Special Cell of Delhi Police had arrested Purkayastha and Chakravarty on 3 October and both of them are currently in judicial custody.

According to the FIR, a large amount of funds to the news portal came from China to "disrupt the sovereignty of India" and cause disaffection against the country. It also alleged Purkayastha conspired with a group -- People's Alliance for Democracy and Secularism (PADS) -- to sabotage the electoral process during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

Raids were conducted at 88 locations in Delhi and seven in other states on October 3 on the suspects named in the FIR and those that surfaced in the analysis of data, police said. *—PTI*

Panic in Dehradun over chlorine gas leak from cylinders

DEHRADUN, 9 JAN

A chlorine gas leak in the Jhajhra area of Dehradun triggered panic on Tuesday and forced people to leave their homes.

The gas leaked from a cylinder kept in a vacant plot of land. Security officials rushed people to safety immediately after being informed about the incident and no damage was reported.

The district control room here was informed about the incident in the morning.

State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) commandant, accompanied by chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear experts with necessary equipment, rushed to the spot and found out that one of the four cylinders kept in the plot located close to a residential area were leaking, the officials said.

National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and fire brigade personnel were also called to the spot, the officials said.

The cylinder found leaking was buried in the ground after filling it with water, an NDRF official said.

The personnel engaged in the operation and people in the area have been asked to use masks till even the faintest effect of the gas remains in the air.

Chlorine acts as a choking agent, which, if inhaled beyond a certain limit, can even be fatal.

Those inside their houses were asked to keep their windows and doors closed.

When the leakage started in the early hours, the residents did not immediately realise it.

First there was a smell, followed by a burning sensation in the eyes and irritation in the throat, Sushma Rawat, a resident said.

She was alarmed when her dog began sneezing repeatedly and it grew louder as the night progressed.

"Someone from the neighbourhood then went out to check and found the cylinders lying in a vacant plot. The effect of the gas in the air was so strong that he could not even breathe and came back running," Rawat said.

The residents were shocked to find in the morning that even vegetables like radish, rai and palak growing in their kitchen gardens had withered due to the poisonous gas leakage. *—PTI*

NDRF and other emergency services at the site following chlorine gas leak in Dehradun on Tuesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

WINTER WONDERLAND LOST

Gulmarg, known for its snow-covered slopes that attract skiers, received barely any snow this season, raising concerns over global warming. The town appears barren and dry with only sparse patches of snow visible on the ground. A striking photo of Gulmarg from last year shows the area covered in a thick blanket of snow with not an inch of ground visible. This year, the region appears dry with no snow covering the ground ***PHOTO: SCREENGRAB***

India Lanka talk early launch of UPI payment

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

Six months after it was announced by the prime ministers of both countries, India has discussed the early launch of the UPI payment system with Sri Lanka and reiterated its support in the cash-strapped island nation's debt restructuring process.

In July 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sri Lanka President Ranil Wickremesinghe signed an agreement on Unified Payments Interface (UPI) acceptance in Sri Lanka during Wickremesinghe's two-day visit to India.

The latest discussion took place on Monday during a meeting between the High Commissioner of India Santosh Jha with the Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL), Dr Nandalal Weerasinghe.

In October, Modi announced that the governments of both India and Sri Lanka are working together on fintech sector connectivity by linking the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and Lanka Pay.

He announced to link UPI and Lanka Pay when he was addressing the event to launch ferry services between Nagapattinam in India and Kankesanthurai in Sri Lanka, via a video message.

Even as Sri Lanka and India marked their 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2023, New Delhi emerged as a steadfast ally of Colombo, playing a pivotal role in the debt-trapped island nation's steady economic recovery. *—PTI*

HC stays CBI probe over invoicing by Adani group

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

PHOTO: REUTERS

Delhi High Court has kept in abeyance its order asking CBI and the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) to "meticulously and expeditiously" look into allegations of over-invoicing of imports by the Adani Group.

A bench of Justices Suresh Kumar Kait and Neena Bansal Krishna, while noting in its 5 January order that a petition filed by Commissioner of Customs (Import) in a matter involving Adani Power Maharashtra Limited is pending before Supreme Court, said its 19 December, 2023 directions to CBI and DRI in respect of Adani Group firms be kept in abeyance until the outcome of the matter before the top court.

Over-invoicing involves inflating the value of goods or services to make it appear that the companies are spending more on imports than they actually are. Over-invoicing is used for several purposes, including to evade taxes or customs duties.

Recently, Adani Power Limited filed an application before High Court placing on record a copy of the order passed by Supreme Court. *—PTI*

819 CASES OF JN.1 REPORTED FROM 12 STATES

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

A total of 819 cases of Covid-19 sub-variant JN.1 were reported from 12 states till Monday, official sources said.

They said 250 cases were reported from Maharashtra, 199 from Karnataka, 148 from Kerala, 49 from Goa, 36 from Gujarat, 30 each from Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan, 26 each from Tamil Nadu and Telangana, 21 from Delhi, three from Odisha and one from Haryana.

Even though the number of JN.1 cases is rising, there is no cause of immediate concern as the majority of those infected are opting for home-based treatment, indicating a mild illness, officials said.

The Centre has asked the states and Union territories to maintain a constant vigil amid an uptick in the number of Covid cases and the detection of the JN.1 sub-variant of the virus in the country.

The states have been urged to ensure effective compliance of the detailed operational guidelines for the revised Covid surveillance strategy shared with them by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

The states have also been asked to monitor and regularly report district-wise cases of Influenza-like Illness (ILI) and Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI) from all health facilities for an early detection of a rising trend of cases.

World Health Organisation (WHO) has classified JN.1 as a separate "variant of interest" given its rapidly-increasing spread, but said it poses a "low" global public health risk.

The JN.1 sub-variant of the coronavirus was previously classified as a variant of interest (VOI) as part of the BA.2.86 sub-lineages, the parent lineage that is classified as a VOI, the world body said. *—PTI*

TIGER FOUND DEAD IN T'GANA DUE TO POISONING

HYDERABAD, 9 JAN

The male tiger found dead yesterday in Kagaznagar forest in Kumuram Bheem Asifabad district of Telangana is suspected to have died of poisoning, forest officials said on Tuesday. The officials also found the carcass of a cow, suspected to have been poisoned and used as bait, in the vicinity of the dead tiger.

However, the tiger carcass, found near a local stream, also had a loosened snare around its neck, officials said. *—PTI*

MORE PRISONERS THAN SANCTIONED

SC junks plea to raise number of prison visits by kins, lawyers

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal said it was not inclined to interfere with the High Court order ***PHOTO: PTI***

- High Court on 16 February last year said the decision has been taken after careful consideration of the facilities available in prisons, availability of staff and the number of undertrials.

Supreme Court on Tuesday upheld an order of Delhi High Court which had said the decision to cap the number of visits by prisoners' families, friends and legal advisers to twice a week has been taken considering the number of inmates, and it cannot be said to be "completely arbitrary".

A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal said it was not inclined to interfere with the High Court order.

High Court on 16 February last year said the decision has been taken after careful consideration of the facilities available in prisons, availability of staff and the number of undertrials.

High Court judgement had come while disposing of a petition challenging certain provisions of the Delhi Prison Rules, 2018.

The petition by advocate Jai Anant Dehadrai had prayed for amendment of the rules to allow interviews with legal advisers be open from Monday to Friday for an appropriate allotted time with no cap on interviews per week.

The petitioner, in the interim, had prayed for visits of the legal counsel to their clients in Delhi prisons more than twice a week.

The petitioner had contended that limiting the number of visits by family members, relatives, friends and legal advisers to twice a week is violative of Article 21 of the Constitution as it limits the rights of an undertrial to have adequate resources to legal representation.

Fixing a cap on the number of visits to an undertrial is manifestly arbitrary as it imposes an unreasonable restriction on the right to legal representation and is violative of the right to access justice which is guaranteed under Article 14 of the Constitution, the petitioner had said.

Delhi government said there are 16 jails in Delhi housing more than 18,000 prisoners against the sanctioned capacity of 10,026. It said that looking at the number of inmates in the prisons here, it was decided to put a cap on the number of visits permitted by family members, relatives, friends and legal counsel.

It had said that providing two legal interviews to a prisoner can be increased on the request of a prisoner or a visiting counsel and it does not fall foul of the constitutional right of the prisoner. *—PTI*

TENDER LOVING, CARE

Artem, a serviceman of infantry battalion of the 61st mechanised brigade, pets a dog in a trench at a position near the frontline, in Kharkiv region, Ukraine
PHOTO: REUTERS

Israel, the US & Iran are inching closer to all-out war

In the last week alone, an Israeli airstrike has killed a Hezbollah commander in Lebanon, Hezbollah struck a sensitive Israeli base with rockets and Israel killed a senior Hamas militant with an airstrike in Beirut.

Each strike and counterstrike increases the risk of the catastrophic war in Gaza spilling across the region.

In the decades-old standoff pitting the US and Israel against Iran and allied militant groups, there are fears that any party could trigger a wider war if only to avoid appearing weak. A US airstrike killed an Iran-backed militia leader in Baghdad last week, and the US Navy recently traded fire with Iran-aligned Houthi rebels in the Red Sea.

The divisions within each camp add another layer of volatility. Hamas might have hoped its 7 October rampage across southern Israel that triggered the war in Gaza would drag its allies into a wider conflict. Israelis increasingly talk about the need to change the equation in Lebanon even as Washington aims to contain the conflict.

Flares rise over the Gaza Strip as seen from southern Israel, on Monday, 8 January ***PHOTO: PTI***

Gaza is ground zero

Hamas says its 7 October attack was a purely Palestinian response to decades of Israeli domination. There is no evidence that Iran, Hezbollah or other allied groups played a direct role or knew about it beforehand.But when Israel responded by launching one of the 21st century's most devastating military campaigns in Gaza, a besieged enclave home to 2.3 million Palestinians, the so-called Axis of Resistance — Iran and the militant groups it supports across the region — faced pressure to respond.The Palestinian cause has deep resonance across the region, and leaving Hamas alone to face Israel's fury would have risked unraveling a military alliance that Iran has been building up since the 1979 Islamic Revolution put it on a collision course with the West."They don't want war, but at the same time they don't want to let the Israelis keep striking without retaliation," said Qassim Qassir, a Lebanese expert on Hezbollah."Something big has to happen, without going to war, so that the Israelis and Americans are convinced that there is no way forward," he said.

Hezabollah threads the needle

Of all Iran's regional proxies, Hezbollah faces the biggest dilemma.If it tolerates Israeli attacks, like the strike in Beirut that killed Hamas' deputy political leader, it risks appearing to be a weak or unreliable ally. But if it triggers a full war, Israel has threatened to wreak major destruction on Lebanon, which is already mired in a severe economic crisis. Even Hezbollah's supporters may see that as too heavy a price to pay for a Palestinian ally.Hezbollah has carried out strikes along the border nearly every day since the war in Gaza broke out, with the apparent aim of tying down some Israeli troops. Israel has returned fire, but each side appears to be calibrating its actions to limit the intensity.

A Hezbollah barrage of at least 40 rockets fired at an Israeli military base on Saturday sent a message without starting a war, though it may have triggered Monday's strike.And experts say it might not be a single strike that does it.Israel is determined to see tens of thousands of its citizens return to communities near the border with Lebanon that were evacuated under Hezbollah fire nearly three months ago. After 7 October, it may no longer be able to tolerate an armed Hezbollah presence on the other side of the frontier.

Israeli leaders have repeatedly threatened to use military force if Hezbollah doesn't respect a 2006 U.N. cease-fire that ordered the militant group to withdraw from the border.

"Neither side wants a war, but the two sides believe it is inevitable," said Yoel Guzansky, a senior researcher at Israel's Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University. "Everybody in Israel thinks it's just a matter of time until we need to change the reality" so that people can return to their homes, he said.

US deterrence only goes so far

The US positioned two aircraft carrier strike groups in the region in October. One is returning home but is being replaced by other warships. The deployments sent an unmistakable warning to Iran and its allies against widening the conflict, but not all seem to have received the message.

Iran-backed militant groups in Syria and Iraq have launched dozens of rocket attacks on U.S. bases. The Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen have attacked international shipping in the Red Sea, with potential consequences for the world economy. Iran says its allies act on their own and not on orders from Tehran. *—AP News*

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

Some hosps are now cutting down cancer drug costs

Scores of patients quietly fill a modest tin shed which serves as a waiting area at a cancer hospital in Silchar, in north-eastern India.

Over the last few months, Cachar Cancer Centre in the state of Assam has seen an unusually high number of patients from nearby towns and villages.

The reason: a quiet revolution that is making cancer drugs more affordable.

The hospital is part of the National Cancer Grid, a group of treatment centres that have clubbed together to bulk buy drugs and bring down costs by more than 85 per cent.

It is a modest start but, literally, a lifesaver for some of the country's poorest people.

Expensive, protracted treatments often put families under immense financial strain or are simply out of reach.

For example, breast cancer treatments can extend for over 10 cycles and cost more than $6,000 (£4,719). In a country where the average monthly salary is less than $700, that is beyond many household budgets.

Baby Nandi, 58, is waiting for her next chemotherapy session at the Cachar hospital clinic. Previously, she had to travel 2,000km (1,242 miles) for breast cancer treatment. The drugs alone cost $650 for one treatment cycle. She needed six cycles. Along with the travel and accommodation costs, her family's finances were pushed to the brink.

Thanks to the new initiative, those drugs are now available in her home city, Silchar, at a third of the cost.

Baby's husband Narayan Nandi said: "We don't have so much money at a go. I had to sell land and borrow from my relatives to take her to Chennai. At least now we can afford her full treatment and be home."

Nearly two million cancer cases are reported a year in India, but consultancy firm EY says that the actual figure could be up to three times as high.

Most people in India have to pay for healthcare themselves. Even for those with insurance or on government schemes, cancer care costs are often not fully covered.

Amal Chandra, the owner of a small shop in rural Assam, knows the problem well. Last year his wife's government health card, which covered $1,800 of health expenses, expired midway through her breast cancer treatment. "I had to borrow $250 to pay for her remaining chemotherapy injections," he told the BBC.

Amal and his wife are now back at the hospital as her cancer has returned but at least now the whole cost of her treatment is covered after the prices of drugs was brought down.

A major issue is that most of India's cancer patients live in towns and rural areas, while the bulk of healthcare resources are in larger cities. This means that patients, like Mrs Nandi, and their families face the added burden of having to travel long distances to access treatment.

Healthcare experts say that getting cancer drugs to these parts of the country is one of the healthcare system's biggest problems. Cachar Cancer Hospital, the only facility of its kind in India's North-eastern hills, is trying to meet that challenge.

It treats 5,000 new patients a year and manages the ongoing treatment of another 25,000 people, who are mainly low-paid workers unable to afford the cost of cancer treatment and travel.

The intense pressure this puts on the not-for-profit organisation's funding means it faces a budget deficit of more than $20,000 a month.

Oncologist Dr Ravi Kannan, who leads the hospital's operations, told the BBC that the initiative to cut cancer drug prices has helped him to buy quality medicines and treat more patients for free.

It has also helped hospitals in smaller towns avoid another serious problem - running out of cancer drugs. Previously, drug supplies outside large urban centres were erratic due to the low numbers of patients and limited funds.

"Now smaller hospitals don't have to get into the negotiation table at all. The price is already decided and comes with a commitment to supply to all hospitals at par," Dr Kannan said.

The initiative to bulk-buy drugs is led by the country's largest cancer centre, Tata Memorial Hospital (TMH) in Mumbai.

The initial list had 40 common off-patent generic drugs, covering 80 per cent of their pharmacy costs, saving the group $170m.The success of the scheme has attracted interest from hospitals and state governments across the country.The next round will expand to over 100 drugs, while broader cancer care purchases like supplies, diagnostics and equipment are also being considered. However, more expensive patented treatments are currently not part of the plan. *—BBC News*

Baby Nandi has been receiving chemotherapy to treat breast cancer ***PHOTO: BBC***

Manipur businesses bearing the burnt of ethnic violence

Helena Kshetri has seen her fruit sales wiped out since an ethnic conflict engulfed the northeast Indian state of Manipur in early May.

"We are often forced to shut shops due to curfews and shutdowns even after months of violence," said the 50-year-old vendor, who works at Ima Keithel, or the Mother's Market, in the state's capital Imphal.

Her sales have crashed from 30,000-40,000 rupees ($360-$480) per day to barely 4,000 rupees ($48). "I deal in fruits and cannot hold them for long in case they rot, and I'm forced to sell even in losses. The government should bring the situation under control so that we can run our businesses," Kshetri said.

Businesses and entrepreneurs, both small and large on both sides of the divide, are hurting on account of the violence that broke out on May 3 and has continued to engulf the state in an ethnic conflict. So far, about 180 people, including women and children have been killed, and several homes, businesses and places of worship have been torched with thousands left homeless, many of whom have fled to other states to seek refuge.

Retail inflation is through the roof at 11.63 percent and the internet has been shut down for vast periods, affecting businesses and residents.

"We are passing through a very difficult phase and the situation is even worse than insurgency, demonetisation [of currency] and COVID," said Haorokcham Anil, the secretary of the Manipur Chamber of Commerce and Industry. "The business has been completely ruined and it's very hard to predict when the situation would be even close to normal."

Violence begins

Manipur is home to several communities and tribal groups including the Meitei, Nagas and Kuki. The dominant Meitei community is largely Hindu and lives in the Imphal Valley, while the Naga and Kuki tribes, who are predominantly Christians, mostly reside in the hills.

The Meiteis comprise 51 percent of Manipur's population of 2.3 million but are concentrated in the plains, holding only 10 percent of the land. Kukis and Nagas, who comprise 40 percent of the population, occupy 90 percent of the land as they are mostly based in the hills that dominate the state's landscape. Due to their larger numbers, Meiteis have a larger share of representation in the politics and state assembly.

Sales for both small entrepreneurs like fruit seller Helena Kshetri, pictured, and big businesses have been wiped out due to the continuing ethnic conflict in the state ***PHOTO: AL JAZEERA***

While tension between the Meitei community and the Kuki tribes had been brewing for a while, it came to the forefront in the first week of May after the Manipur High Court, acting on a writ petition on April 14, directed the state government to send a recommendation to the federal government to grant tribal status to the Meiteis. The court's order was strongly opposed by the Kukis who argued that it would further strengthen the already dominant Meitei community.

Members of a community with tribal status get reservations in government jobs and educational institutions.

On 3 May, the All Tribal Students' Union Manipur rallied across all hill districts of the state to protest the court order. The demonstrations turned violent and the next day, the violence spread to the capital Imphal with clashes breaking out between the two groups.

The situation is still tense and this journalist was held briefly by members of one of the groups for nearly two hours while conducting interviews in the state last month.

'Forced to completely shut'

The violence has almost paralysed the state economy, leaving the business community in severe distress with no signs of recovery in the near future.

Several entrepreneurs said their businesses have been hit by more than 70 percent in losses and it has become difficult to even maintain daily expenses, forcing them to retrench their employees and adopt other cost-cutting measures.

Thangjam Joy Kumar Singh, the managing director of Likla, one of the biggest fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) brands in the state selling fruit juices, pickles, bakery and packaged drinking water, conceded that he has been forced to lay off 200 of his 900 employees.

"Initially, I didn't take the situation seriously and thought that things would turn normal within a week, but I was wrong. It was something that we had never witnessed before. We were forced to completely shut our factories for the first 15 days before we started producing packaged water as it was a necessary commodity," he said.

Singh shut his bakery division for nearly three months and closed the bakery outlets in Kuki-dominated areas fearing violence.

"At present, we are operating at just 50 percent of our capacity and somehow managing to run the show," he said.The ethnic tension has split the two communities into separate zones. As a result, neither side can enter the other's territory to do business or any activity for fear of being attacked or even killed.

Keisham Ranjan Singh, a Meitei who had a modular furniture showroom in the Kuki-dominated Churachandpur District about 60km (37 miles) from Imphal, rued that he had lost approximately 8 million rupees ($96,000) in the mayhem after his shop there was set on fire on May 16."We had Kuki workers also but they have lost their livelihood due to the turmoil," he said.

Businesses in Imphal have not been spared.

Dinesh Kapoor, 59, a sound engineer who runs a sound system shop in the state capital has seen his sales crash as he used to get a lot of customers from the hills.Compared with the 1 million rupees ($12,029) that Kapoor would typically make per day in the holiday season from sales of sound systems, his revenue from the shop has crashed to a mere 15,000 rupees ($180) a day."The months starting from November to March [are] good for business because Christmas, New Year, Holi and even Thabal Chongba, the biggest festival of the state, is held. But the violence has destroyed all. We hardly have any sales and it's difficult to even pay the rent of the shop. The market in Imphal mostly depends on the people from the hills and their absence has affected us badly," Singh said. *—Courtesy, Al Jazeera*

Norway to approve controversial deep-sea mining

OSLO, 9 JAN

Norway is likely to become the first country in the world to move forward with the controversial practice of commercial-scale deep-sea mining. The plan, up before a parliamentary vote on Tuesday, will accelerate the hunt for precious metals which are in high demand for green technologies. Environmental scientists have warned it could be devastating for marine life. The vote concerns Norwegian waters, but agreement on mining in international waters could also be reached this year. The vote is expected to pass without hindrance after it secured cross-party backing at the end of 2023. The Norwegian government said it was being cautious and would only begin issuing licences once further environmental studies were carried out. The deep sea hosts potato-sized rocks called nodules and crusts which contain minerals such as lithium, scandium and cobalt, critical for clean technologies, including in batteries. *—BBC News*

Hindus hold car rally in US ahead of Ram temple's consecration

HOUSTON, 9 JAN

Members of the Hindu American community on Sunday held a huge car rally across Houston, stopping at 11 temples along the way amid bhajans and slogans of 'Jai Shri Ram' in view of the consecration ceremony of the Ram temple in Ayodhya later this month. Temple officials received a formal invitation from Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) to attend the consecration ceremony being held in Ayodhya on 22 January. Over 500 enthusiastic riders, carrying saffron banners with an image of the Ram temple, the Indian flag and the US flag, participated in the rally in a 3-miles-long line of 216 cars escorted by eight policemen on bikes. *—PTI*

South Korea passes law banning dog meat trade

SEOUL, 9 JAN

South Korea's parliament has endorsed landmark legislation outlawing dog meat consumption, a centuries-old practice. The National Assembly passed the bill by a 208-0 vote on Tuesday. It will become law after it's endorsed by the Cabinet Council and signed by President Yoon Suk Yeol, steps considered a formality as Yoon's government supports the ban. The bill would make the slaughtering, breeding, trade and sales of dog meat for human consumption illegal from 2027 and punish such acts with 2-3 years in prison. Efforts to ban dog meat consumption have faced fierce resistance from farmers and others in the country's dwindling dog meat industry. Recent surveys show a majority of South Koreans don't eat dog meat any longer. *—AP*

PHOTO: PTI

Imran to remain in jail in connection with Army HQ attack

ISLAMABAD, 9 JAN

Jailed former prime minister Imran Khan was on Tuesday arrested in a case related to the attack on the Pakistan Army headquarters in Rawalpindi on 9 May last year, soon after his release warrant was issued in the cipher case. An anti-terrorism court (ATC) in Rawalpindi had summoned the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder, who is already behind bars in cipher and graft cases, in May 9 cases on Tuesday. However, Khan attended the court's proceedings via video link as he could not be produced in the court by Adiala jail authorities owing to security concerns. During the hearing of the cases, police sought physical remand of the 71-year-old founder in the GHQ attack case, however, ATC Judge Malik Aijaz Asif turned down the request, Geo News reported. *—PTI*

Bangladesh polls 'not fair' say United Nations, US, UK

Asian, African and South American leaders laud Hasina's victory

DHAKA / UNITED NATIONS, 9 JAN

A man holds a Bangladeshi newspaper that has the news of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's election victory in Dhaka, Bangladesh **PHOTO: AP**

Even as India, Russia, China and several nations from Asia, Africa and South America greeted Sheikh Hasina for securing a historic fourth term as prime minister, the United Nations, the United States and the United Kingdom expressed their reservations terming the polls as "not free or fair."

Hasina's Awami League (AL) won 223 seats in the 300-member Parliament on Sunday in the polls boycotted by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the main Opposition.

The Bangladesh government had invited a large number of foreign observers from India and other countries, as well as multilateral organisations, to observe the elections.

The US State Department, in a press statement Monday, said that Washington remains concerned by the arrests of thousands of political Opposition members and by reports of irregularities on election day in Bangladesh.

"The United States shares the view with other observers that these elections were not free or fair and we regret that not all parties participated," the State Department said. "We encourage the Government of Bangladesh to credibly investigate reports of violence and to hold perpetrators accountable. We also urge all political parties to reject violence," it said.

UN Human Rights Chief Volker Turk called on Bangladesh's newly elected government to take steps to renew the country's commitment to democracy and human rights, voicing distress that the environment for Sunday's poll was marred by violence and repression of Opposition candidates and supporters.

"In the months leading up to the vote, thousands of Opposition supporters have been detained arbitrarily or subjected to intimidation. Such tactics are not conducive to a truly genuine process," T rk said and noted that democracy was "hard-won" in Bangladesh and "must not become cosmetic." Around 25,000 Opposition supporters have been arrested, including key party leaders, since October, the UN official said and raised serious concerns about possible torture or harsh conditions of detention as at least 10 Opposition supporters reportedly died or were killed in custody in the last two months.

An associate spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Florencia Soto Ni o, in response to a question on whether the UN believes the elections were free and fair, said, "We have seen the situation that's unfolding there.

The Secretary-General continues to follow what's happening. He notes the Opposition's decision to boycott the elections."

She said the UN chief is "obviously concerned" about reports of incidents of violence prior to, and during the elections.

The UK said that standards of credible and fair competition were not consistently met during Bangladesh's 12th parliamentary elections. *—PTI*

4th batch of Epstein court docs released

NEW YORK, 9 JAN

- According to hundreds of pages of documents disclosed on Monday, Ransome said in emails that she had seen sex tapes in Epstein's possession showing figures including Bill Clinton, Prince Andrew and Sir Richard Branson

Another tranche of court documents related to sex offender Jeffrey Epstein has been released.

The filings of more than 250 pages show one accuser claimed to have seen sex tapes filmed by the disgraced financier. However, Sarah Ransome later said she wanted to retract the allegations. It's the fourth release of records related to victim Virginia Giuffre's case against Ghislaine Maxwell, Epstein's former girlfriend.

The lawsuit, filed in 2015, was settled in 2017. Maxwell has since been jailed for 20 years for helping Epstein abuse young girls. She is appealing against her conviction.

According to hundreds of pages of documents disclosed on Monday, Ransome said in emails that she had seen sex tapes in Epstein's possession showing figures including Bill Clinton, Prince Andrew and Sir Richard Branson.

However, the New Yorker magazine reported in 2019 that Ransome had admitted fabricating the claim. In one undated email from the released files included as evidence, Ransome says:

"When my friend had sexual intercourse with Clinton, Prince Andrew and Richard Branson, sex tapes were in fact filmed on each separate occasion by Jeffery [sic]."

Ransome, who said Epstein abused her as an aspiring model and fashion student, also claims in one message that Donald Trump had sex with a friend of hers at Epstein's New York home. BBC has contacted the four men for comment - all of them have previously denied any wrongdoing in relation to Epstein.

No evidence of the tapes, which Ms Ransome claimed in the emails that her friend possessed and she had copied, has ever emerged.

Referring to the New Yorker report, a spokesperson for Sir Richard's Virgin Group said on Monday: "We can confirm that Sarah Ransome's claims are baseless and unfounded."

Trump spokesman Steven Cheung also said Ms Ransome's claims about the former president were "baseless". *—BBC News*

Blinken seeks a plan for Gaza's post-war future

US Secretarty of State Antony Blinken walks on the day of meetings with Israeli ministers on Tuesday in Israel **PHOTO: AP**

TEL AVIV, 9 JAN

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken held talks in Israel on Tuesday as he seeks a plan for Gaza's post-war future, while Israel's military pushed ahead with its offensive in the beleaguered territory. Heavy bombardment and fighting shook refugee camps, sending Palestinians scrambling to find safety and hampering aid groups' efforts to get relief to the population.

Blinken arrived in Israel after saying he had secured commitments from four Arab nations and Turkey to help in rebuilding Gaza after the war, something they'd been reluctant to promise before a stop in fighting.

But the US and Israel remain deeply divided over how Gaza will be run when — and if — its current Hamas rulers are defeated.

American officials have called for the Palestinian Authority, which currently governs parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, to take over in Gaza and for negotiations to resume on the creation of a Palestinian state.

Israeli leaders have staunchly refused both.

Blinken is also trying to prevent the conflict from spreading after an escalation in fighting between Israel and Hezbollah and threats by Israel to step up military action to put an end to almost daily fire across the border from Lebanon by the militant group.

But the pace of death and destruction has remained largely the same, with several hundred Palestinians killed a day, according to health officials in Gaza. *—AP*

FAUDA' ACTOR AMEDI SERIOUSLY INJURED IN GAZA

JERUSALEM, 9 JAN

Israeli actor-singer Idan Amedi, best known for starring in Netflix series "Fauda", was seriously injured while fighting as a IDF reservist in Khan Younis in the Gaza Strip. Israeli diplomat Avia Levi shared the news of Amedi's injury in a post on microblogging site X.

"Idan Amedi, one of 'Fauda's' actors, has been seriously injured in a battle in Gaza. "We pray and pray for your speedy recovery," Levi posted. According to Times of Israel, Amedi, 35, was fighting as an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) reservist. He was airlifted to a hospital on Monday where he was sedated and received treatment.

His father later told an Israeli news outlet that his son was no longer in danger. As a reservist, Amedi was serving in the Combat Engineering Corps when he was injured.

He was brought to Sheba Medical Centre in Ramat Gan at about 4 pm on Monday and underwent urgent, serious and lengthy surgery, according to media reports. *—PTI*

BRAZIL: 25 KILLED AFTER TOURIST BUS COLLIDES WITH TRUCK

RIO, 9 JAN

At least 25 people are dead and six injured after a minibus carrying tourists from a coastal trip collided with a truck in Brazil's northeastern state of Bahia, local authorities said on Monday.

The crash happened overnight on a federal road between cities of Nova Fatima and Gaviao in inland Bahia, the state's local fire department outpost said in a statement. The injured were taken to nearby hospitals, it added. Most of the victims were in the minibus, Bahia civil police said, noting that the cause of the accident is under investigation. *—Reuters*

The satellite was launched off the Xichang Satellite Launch Centre in China's Sichuan province at 15:03 local time, Taiwan's defence ministry said **PHOTO: AFP**

China satellite launch over Taiwan triggers alert

TAIPEI CITY, 9 JAN

Taiwan issued an island wide air raid alert after a Chinese satellite flew over its southern airspace days before a crucial presidential election.

Mobile phone users across the self-ruled island received a message warning them to "be aware for your safety". The "presidential alert" underlined jitters ahead of pivotal presidential and legislative elections on Saturday.

China has long claimed Taiwan as part of its own territory and has been accused of interfering in the vote.

The self-governing island of 23 million people, is a key flashpoint in the tussle between China and the US for supremacy in Asia. Analysts say the elections will shape the trajectory of ties between Beijing and Washington.

The satellite was launched off the Xichang Satellite Launch Centre in China's Sichuan province at 15:03 local time, Taiwan's defence ministry said. At about the same time as the alert, China's CCTV announced that a satellite named Einstein Probe had been launched with "complete success".

Taiwan's foreign minister Joseph Wu said the launch of a satellite over Taiwanese airspace so close to the election is a "greyzone" activity, Reuters news agency reported. "When a rocket is openly flying in our sky, some of their tubes or debris will fall in this region," said Wu, who was at a news conference when the alert was sent.

"That's the reason why our national alert centre will issue this kind of alert. It has happened before." *—BBC News*

US NAVY SAILOR JAILED FOR SPYING FOR CHINA

WASHINGTON, 9 JAN

A US Navy sailor who admitted to providing sensitive military information to China has been jailed for more than two years.

Wenheng Zhao, 26, pleaded guilty in October to passing on information to Chinese intelligence for bribes. Zhao was a petty officer working at a California naval base. He passed on information about military exercises, operational orders and critical infrastructure from 2021 to 2023, US officials said.

Specifically, he provided information about the US Navy's large-scale drills in the Indo-Pacific region, as well as electrical diagrams and blueprints for a radar system located at the US base on the Japanese island of Okinawa. The US Navy's base there in Okinawa is critical to its operations in Asia. *—BBC News*

China: MI6 spy detained, authorities claim

BEIJING, 9 JAN

Chinese authorities say they have detained an individual alleged to be spying for Britain's foreign intelligence service, MI6.

China's Ministry of State Security (MSS) said the individual was a foreigner and was trying to collect information inside the country. It is the latest arrest in a campaign by Chinese security to clamp down on foreign spying.

The British government has not commented on the claims. The news of the arrest came in a statement issued in a post from the MSS on the WeChat social network.

It said the alleged spy was named "Huang" and came from a "third country," implying they were neither British nor Chinese. It said consular visits had been arranged following the arrest but did not say from which country. *—BBC News*

NEARLY 2 YEARS OF WAR

'Ukraine has deficit of anti-aircraft guided missiles'

KYIV, 9 JAN

Ukraine has a deficit of anti-aircraft guided missiles nearly two years after Russia's full-scale invasion, Air Force spokesperson Yuriy Ihnat said on Tuesday.

Ukraine has relied heavily on military and financial aid from its Western allies since the invasion in February 2022, but political wrangling has delayed the disbursement of major aid packages for this year.

Ihnat told Ukrainian television that Ukraine had used a "considerable reserve" of missiles defending itself against recent attacks, and added: "It is clear that there is a deficit of anti-aircraft guided missiles."

Russia has stepped up missile and drone attacks on Ukraine in the past few weeks, firing hundreds of missiles and drones at Ukrainian cities far behind the frontline, Ukrainian officials have said.

In the latest strike this week, Russia fired 51 missiles of various types, killing at least four people and hitting civilian infrastructure, they said.

Ukraine said it shot down 18 of the cruise missiles that were fired, a much lower rate of interception than usual. Ukrainian officials attributed this to the large number of ballistic missiles fired by Russia as they are harder to intercept. Ihnat said that he hoped that delays over Western aid packages would be resolved soon as Ukraine depended on Western supplies not only for air defence ammunition. "We have more and more Western equipment today and, accordingly, it needs maintenance, repair, updating, replenishment, and corresponding ammunition," he said. Yehor Chernev, a lawmaker, told Ukrainian television that the government would discuss how to strengthen its air defences at a meeting with its NATO allies this week.

Rescuers with a dog work at the site of a Russian missile strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Ukraine **PHOTO: REUTERS**

Ukrainian officials had warned that Russia was stockpiling missiles for more attacks during the critical cold months, hoping to inflict more damage on the energy grid after air strikes caused frequent power cuts last winter. *—Reuters*

MACRON PICKS ATTAL, 34, AS FRANCE'S YOUNGEST PM

PARIS, 9 JAN

Gabriel Attal has been named France's next Prime Minister, as Emmanuel Macron aims to revive his presidency with a new government. At 34, he is the youngest ever prime minister in modern French history, outranking even Socialist Laurent Fabius who was 37 when he was appointed by François Mitterrand in 1984. Attal replaces Élisabeth Borne, who has resigned after 20 months in office. Throughout that time she struggled with a lack of a majority in parliament. Attal, who is currently education minister, certainly makes an eye-catching appointment. He will now have the task of leading the French government into important European Parliament elections in June. His rise has been rapid. Ten years ago he was an obscure adviser in the health ministry, and a card-carrying member of the Socialists. He will also be the first openly gay occupant of Hôtel Matignon. He has a civil partnership with another Macron whizz-kid, the MEP Stéphane Sejourné. But given the difficulties of the president's second term - and the growing challenge from the nationalist right - is "eye-catching" alone going to cut it? *—BBC News*

Rupee gains 3p to settle at 83.11 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 9 JAN

Rising for the third straight session, the rupee appreciated three paise to close at 83.11 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, tracking positive equity market and foreign fund inflows.Crude oil prices hovering around USD 77 per barrel and recent weakness in the US dollar also supported the domestic unit, forex traders said.At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened strong at 83.07 and traded between the peak of 83.04 and the lowest level of 83.13 against the greenback during the session.It finally settled at 83.11 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 3 paise from its previous close.The domestic currency settled 1 paisa higher at 83.14 on Monday, a day after gaining nine paise. Analysts said investors will keep a close watch on domestic inflation numbers as well as the data from the US to be released later this week.Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.17 per cent higher at 102.10 on Tuesday.—*PTI*

Gold remains ₹63,200 per 10 grams; silver climbs ₹450

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

Gold price remained flat at Rs 63,200 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday, according to HDFC Securities. However, silver climbed Rs 450 to Rs 76,750 per kilogram. It settled at Rs 76,300 per kg in the previous trade. "Gold prices steadied on Tuesday in the Delhi markets, trading flat at Rs 63,200/10 grams, unchanged from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the futures trade, the February contract of gold rose Rs 261 to Rs 62,356 per 10 grams on the MCX. Also, the March contract of silver advanced Rs 176 to Rs 72,603 per kilogram on the exchange. In the global markets, gold and silver are trading marginally higher at USD 2,031 per ounce and USD 23.10 per ounce, respectively. Spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,031 per ounce, up by USD 2 from the previous close in the international markets. NavneetDamani, senior VP of commodity research at MotilalOswal Financial Services, said gold traded steady after inching lower in the previous session. —*PTI*

JSW Steel's crude steel output grows 12 pc to 6.87 MT

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

JSW Steel on Tuesday reported a 12 per cent year-on-year rise in its consolidated crude steel production to 6.87 million tonnes (MT) in October-December period of ongoing fiscal. Its consolidated crude steel production was at 6.14 MT in the same period last financial year, according to a statement. From its India operations, the company produced 6.63 MT of steel in October-December, up 9 per cent over 6.06 MT in the year-ago period. In India, the capacity utilisation level stood at 94 per cent in the third quarter. JSW Steel USA - Ohio produced 0.24 MT steel, up three-fold from 0.8 MT produced in OctoberDecember 2022-23. JSW Steel is the flagship business of the diversified USD 23 billion JSW Group. —*PTI*

GE Power India gets Rs 10 crore order from NTPC

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

GE Power India Limited on Tuesday said it received an order worth Rs 10.3 crore from state-owned NTPC.The order is for supply of spares and repair of high power inner casing module, GE Power India said in a BSE filing.The order is to be completed in 10.5 months, the company said.GE is a leading player in engineering, manufacturing, project management and supply of products and solutions for power generation and transmission infrastructure requirements.—*PTI*

Market rebound loses steam in fag-end trade

After rising sharply, the 30-share BSE Sensex trimmed most of the gains

MUMBAI, 9 JAN

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty on Tuesday closed moderately higher after a fag-end sell-off minimised the handsome gains posted in early trading.

Besides, investors opted for profit-taking ahead of the start of corporate earnings season and macroeconomic data announcements later this week, traders said.

After rising sharply during the day, the 30-share BSE Sensex trimmed most of the gains during the fag-end trading and ended marginally higher by 30.99 points or 0.04 per cent at 71,386.21. During the day, it jumped 680.25 points or 0.95 per cent to 72,035.47.

The Nifty also gave up most of the intra-day gains and closed 31.85 points or 0.15 per cent up at 21,544.85. During the day, it climbed 211.45 points or 0.98 per cent to 21,724.45.

"Markets witnessed a roller coaster ride on Tuesday and ended almost flat, in continuation to the prevailing consolidation phase. Firm global cues triggered a gag-up start in Nifty, which further strengthened with renewed buying in select heavyweights however a sharp cut in the latter half trimmed the gains," said Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd.

During the day, it jumped 680.25 points or 0.95 per cent to 72,035.47 ***PHOTO: X***

Larsen & Toubro was the biggest gainer on the Sensex chart, rising 1.55 per cent, followed by BhartiAirtel, HCL Tech, Tata Motors, Sun Pharma and Tata Steel.

On the other hand, Nestle, Asian Paints, Bajaj Finserv, HDFC Bank and Axis Bank were among the laggards.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.37 per cent, and the midcap index rose 0.07 per cent.

Among the sectoral indices, realty jumped 2.52 per cent, power rallied 1.10 per cent, auto (1.02 per cent), healthcare (0.90 per cent), capital goods (0.89 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.68 per cent).

In contrast, FMCG, telecommunication, bankex and consumer durables were the losers.

- Larsen & Toubro was the biggest gainer on the Sensex chart, rising 1.55 per cent, followed by BhartiAirtel, HCL Tech, Tata Motors, and Tata Steel

"Positive sentiments in the Indian IT sector, fuelled by a US tech rally and demand on emerging technologies, overshadowed the anticipated muted Q3 results of the sector.

"Market optimism about potential softening of US inflation is driving expectations of near-term rate cuts, bolstering overall sentiment. But in-between profit-booking is emerging due to mixed cues from Asian markets as well as high valuation concerns," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. —*PTI*

Commerce ministry sets up task force to resolve trade issues

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

The commerce ministry has set up a task force to identify and resolve trade barriers being faced by exporters in other countries, a move which would help provide greater market access to domestic goods, an official said.

The development assumes significance as many times India's exports suffer from these barriers such as time taking prior registration requirements and unreasonable domestic standards/rules in many countries.

"We have constituted a task force within the ministry where we will be looking at the trade barriers, and technical barriers. The ministry has been focusing on how to improve systems, and improve standards," the official said.

The ministry is also looking at improving mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) with different countries so that product standards are as per the requirements of the importing countries.

Standards for goods and services should help in promoting global trade and not act as non-tariff barriers, the official added.

According to a report of the economic think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), India needs to act in a fast-track manner for removal of non-trade barriers (NTBs), being faced by domestic exporters in different countries like the US, China and Japan, to achieve one trillion dollar outbound shipment target for goods by 2030.

It has asked for upgrading domestic systems, in cases where Indian products are rejected due to quality issues; and retaliating if unreasonable standards or rules continue to obstruct exports from New Delhi.

Key Indian exports that routinely face high barriers include chillies, tea, basmati rice, milk, poultry, bovine meat, fish, chemicals products to EU; sesame seed, black tiger shrimps, medicines, apparels to Japan; food, meat, fish, dairy, industrial products to China; shrimps to the US; and bovine meat to South Korea, the report has said. —*PTI*

WeWork India has launched the tool, 'WeWork Workplace', in collaboration with Yardi a leading workspace management solution ***PHOTO: REUTERS***

WeWork offers tech-enabled space management for big firms

BENGALURU, 9 JAN

Coworking major WeWork India on Tuesday introduced a new space management tool that will help big corporates in optimising their real estate portfolio and save cost.

WeWork India has launched the tool, 'WeWork Workplace', in collaboration with Yardi, a leading workspace management solution.

Commenting on the new product, Karan Virwani, CEO of WeWork India, said this will help large corporations in managing their entire office portfolio, be it owned and leased spaces.

He said the company has already started offering this solution to enterprises at a very nominal charge.

Virwani said the solution will also help the company in revenue growth as it will create demand for flexible workspace.

"In an era where hybrid and flexible work culture take centrestage, space management plays a very crucial role for enterprises."

There is an urgent need to scope out operational inefficiencies in a systematic manner, for businesses to thrive, he added.

"Workplace tool is uniquely placed to help businesses optimise their functional office space requirements while elevating the office experience for its employees in an intentional way. It will facilitate real-time insights for data-driven decision-making," Virwani said.

WeWork Workplace tool can combine all space types (privately leased/owned, WeWork and WeWork shared/affiliate) within a single experience, the company said in a statement.

Additionally, companies that may need overflow space will have the option to enable access to WeWork and WeWork affiliated locations for their employees globally, it added.

The tool offers enterprises a streamlined approach to integrate and manage space as well as optimise portfolios, along with access to 500-plus WeWork workspaces on one platform. —*PTI*

3 chargesheeted for cheating customers

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

The CBI has filed a charge sheet against three people and a company for allegedly cheating customers of Amazon in the United States and Mexico by not supplying products bought through the online marketplace, officials said Tuesday.

The agency has invoked IPC sections 120-B (criminal conspiracy), 420 (cheating) and 471 (forgery) among others against Ayush Kumar Gupta, Piyush Gupta, Om Prakash Gupta and Gupta Trading Co, they said.The agency had filed an FIR against them on September 27,2022. —*PTI*

ETS signs MoU with Physics Wallah

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

Educational Testing Service (ETS) India has signed a memorandum of understanding with Physics Wallah (PW), an EdTech platform, to provide holistic guidance and support to students aspiring to study in leading international universities and help them prepare for the GRE and TOEFL exams.US-based ETS conducts the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). ETS India is a subsidiary of ETS.According to officials, with this agreement, PW aims to streamline the study-abroad market through its new vertical called "PW Unigo", particularly in tier-2 and tier-3 cities, and fill the gap in the space where students often do not find the right channel to fulfil their dreams due to a lack of awareness and mentorship. PW Unigo will be a full-stack end-to-end study-abroad service provider for such aspirants. —*PTI*

Adani ports' first bond issue in over 2 yrs in high demand

MUMBAI, 9 JAN

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone, the largest private port operator in India, entered the bond market for the first time in over two years on Monday, with the issue garnering strong demand.

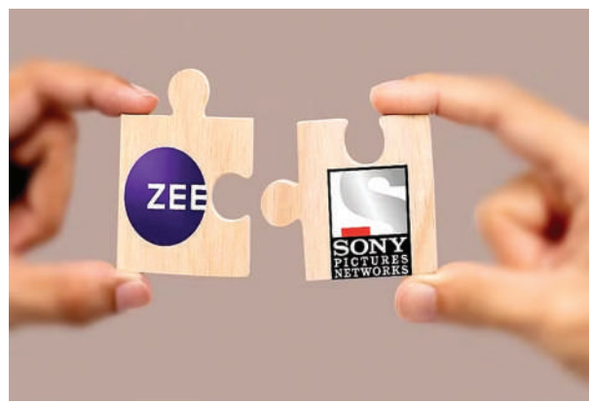
The fundraising follows the Supreme Court's decision that the group is not required to undergo additional investigations beyond the market regulator's current scrutiny.

The decision brought major relief to the conglomerate hit hard by allegations of wrongdoing by a US short-seller.

Earlier in the day, the group's port operator unit accepted bids aggregating to 5 billion ($60.2 million) for two listed bonds, with one maturing in five years and the other in 10 at coupons of 7.80 per cent and 7.90 per cent, respectively.

The company received bids totalling 10 billon, with participation from banks and insurance companies, according to three merchant bankers. —*Reuters*

MERGER WORK ON



The Merger Cooperation Agreement between the two parties was signed on 22 December, 2021 ***PHOTO: REUTERS***

Zee says working towards closure of merger with Sony

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

Zee Entertainment on Tuesday said it is "committed" to the merger with Sony Pictures Networks India and is working towards a "successful closure" of the transaction that will create the country's largest media house worth USD 10 billion.

The deadline of completion of the merger with Sony Pictures, now known as Culver Max Entertainment Private Ltd (CMEPL), has been extended for a month till January 21 after Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) sought an extension under the Merger Cooperation Agreement signed between them two years before.

"We wish to reiterate that the company is committed to the merger with Sony and is continuing to work towards a successful closure of the proposed merger," ZEEL said in a filing to the stock exchanges.

The filing was submitted in response to a clarification sought by the bourses on reports that Sony might call off the deal.

The Merger Cooperation Agreement between the two parties was signed on 22 December, 2021.

On 17 December, 2023, the Subhash Chandra family-promoted ZEEL sought an extension in deadline for completion of the merger from Sony Group Corporation (SGC) firm CMEL and Bangla Entertainment Pvt Ltd (BEPL) under the agreement. Subsequently, the deadline, which was to end on 21 December, 2023, was extended by a month.

According to industry sources, the fate of the USD 10 billion-merger is hanging by a thread, with the two parties yet are unable to finalise an agreement as the end of the one-month grace period looms.

The parties are yet to come to an agreement over MD and CEO PunitGoenka leading the merged entity as Sony has expressed concerns after market regulator Sebi barred him from holding managerial posts at Zee group entities in connection with a fund diversion case. —*PTI*

Jindal Materials commits ₹1K cr investment in TN

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

Composite materials manufacturer Jindal Advanced Materials has pledged an investment of about Rs 1,000 crore to set up a plant in Tamil Nadu, its first in south India.

As part of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the state government, it will set up a manufacturing plant over an area of 250 acres, the company said in a statement on Tuesday.

Jindal Advanced Materials has signed an MoU with the Tamil Nadu government to set up a new manufacturing plant at a strategic investment of nearly Rs 1,000 crore, the statement said, adding that the investment will be spread across seven years.

The project, which will come up in Trichy, is the company's first manufacturing facility in south India and is expected to generate up to 3,000 job opportunities, it said.

"This MoU is instrumental in elevating our customer service experience in the South. Tamil Nadu's robust infrastructure, Trichy's proximity to the port for enhanced trade opportunities, and the existing ecosystem in infrastructure and aerospace sectors position us well to expand our commitments further," Jindal Advanced Materials Director CP Agrawal said.

Part of the OP Jindal Group, Jindal Advanced Materials is a leading manufacturer of high-performance and innovative composite materials. —*PTI*

STUDYING GLOBAL EXAMPLES

With Ayodhya being redeveloped, 3L visitors are expected daily

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

In the coming years, more than three lakh people are expected to visit Ayodhya daily and the planning for the temple town has been done after studying similar examples abroad, including Vatican City, Cambodia, Jerusalem, as also places in India, such as Tirupati and Amritsar, according to DikshuKukreja, the master planner behind the project.

In the coming years, more than three lakh people are expected to visit Ayodhya ***PHOTO: PTI***

Efficient land use, minimum congestion, a focus on dharamshalas (inns) and homestays, upgrading the infrastructure while retaining the historical and cultural character of the city are some of the highlights of the plan prepared by Kukreja, the managing principal of C P Kukreja Architects. "Ayodhya is anticipated to become a global tourism destination with a focus on spiritual, cultural, heritage assets and events as the city is likely to grow manifold with a significant demand in hospitality and allied industries.

"The city is envisaged to be developed as a mega centre for tourist, economic and religious activities. More than three lakh devotees are expected to visit Ayodhya daily within the next three-four years," Kukreja told PTI in an interview. "To accommodate the needs of a growing population and tourism, we designed modern infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, sewage systems and utilities, while ensuring that these developments did not compromise the historical and cultural character of the city. We worked on designing a layout for the township that promotes efficient land use, minimises congestion and enhances the overall quality of life for the residents," he added.

Kukreja, who has previously designed the Aerocity in Delhi and "Yashobhoomi" --the India International Convention Centre (IICC) in Dwarka -- explained that his team studied existing temple towns across the globe as well as in India to understand the needs and drew inspiration from the best practices adopted there.

"We studied similar places abroad, including Vatican City, Jerusalem and Cambodia. We also examined examples like Tirupati and Amritsar. The best practices adopted there have been incorporated in our plan after being customised to suit the local context of Ayodhya," he said.

The first phase of the temple is nearing completion and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will take part in its consecration ceremony on 22 January. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

ITF Mandya Open: Manish enters pre-quarterfinals

MANDYA, 9 JAN

Indians Manish Ganesh and Siddharth Vishwakarma registered easy wins to enter the men's singles pre-quarterfinals of the ITF Mandya Open here Tuesday.Ganesh breezed past Neeraj Yashpaul 6-1, 6-1, while Vishwakarma overcame Adil Kalyanpur 6-3, 6-1 to reach the round of 16.However, local man SD Prajwal Dev, who was recently added to the Indian Davis Cup team to face Pakistan, suffered a disappointment in the men's doubles round of 16. Prajwal and his partner Nitin Kumar Sinha, seeded second in the event, were leading 5-4 against the Indo-Koren pair of Woobin Shin and Karan Singh in the first set.—*PTI*

PHOTO: AFP

Srikanth shocks Christie to enter second round

KUALA LUMPUR, 9 JAN

India's Kidambi Srikanth progressed to the second round of the Malaysia Open Super 1000 badminton tournament with a come-from-behind win over world number 5 Indonesian Jonatan Christie here on Tuesday. The 30-year-old from Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, who has been going through a lean phase for quite some time, notched up a stunning 12-21 21-18 21-16 win over sixth seed Christie in the opening round match that lasted an hour and five minutes.—*AP*

PHOTO: PTI

BATC: Sindhu to return from injury, Prannoy to lead

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

Recovering from a knee injury, double Olympic medallist PV Sindhu will return to action at the Asian Team Championships as she was on Tuesday named in the Indian squad for the prestigious tournament.Sindhu, who suffered a knee injury at the French Open last year and has been out of action since, and World No. 8 H S Prannoy will spearhead a strong Indian squad at the continental championships slated to be held in Shah Alam, Malaysia from February 13-19.The team event will be important for Indian shuttlers to gain valuable qualification points in the Race to Paris Olympic qualification.—*PTI*

Rudrankksh, Mehuli duo wins India's fifth gold

JAKARTA, 9 JAN

The Indian pair of Rudrankksh Patil and Mehuli Ghosh gave the country its fifth gold medal at the Asia Olympic Qualifiers, winning the 10m Air Rifle Mixed Team event here on Tuesday.The Indian pair triumphed after prevailing over China's Shen Yufan and Zhu Mingshuai 16-10 in the final.In the 10m Air Pistol Mixed Team event, however, India settled for the silver medal with the duo of Arjun Cheema and Rhythm Sangwan finishing second behind Vietnam's Thu Vinh Trinh and Quang Huy Pham in the battle for the top prize.The team of Rhythm and Arjun topped the qualification round with a total score of 582, finishing ahead of the second-placed combo (580) from Vietnam, but they could not get the better of their opponents when it mattered the most.—*AP*

Nat'l sports awards: Shami, Sheetal draw rousing applause

The athletes have received the Arjuna Awards for their performances in 2023

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

India's best-performing athletes were on Tuesday conferred with the national sports awards by President Droupadi Murmu in a regal ceremony where cricketer Mohammed Shami and para archer Sheetal Devi walked into a rapturous applause at the Rashtrapati Bhawan.

Shuttlers Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy were chosen for the coveted Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna award for a breakout 2023, during which they won their maiden Asian Games gold a first for India in badminton , while also clinching the Asian Championships title and the Indonesia Open Super 1000 title.

Shami, who is currently recovering from an ankle injury, was there to receive the honours and the crowd duly acknowledged his achievements by giving him and his art the pride of place with an ovation. The pace bowler took 24 wickets in seven World Cup games last year.

"I aim to keep myself fit as far as possible, as the next two tournaments and series are big. I will focus on fitness," he told PTI at a sports ministry reception last night.

President Droupadi Murmu presents the Sports and Adventure Awards 2023 to Mohammed Shami and Arjuna award to Para -archer Sheetal devi in Rashtrapati Bhavan **PHOTO: PTI**

President Droupadi Murmu presents the Arjuna Award to kho-kho player Nasreen and the Arjuna Award to blind cricketer Ajay Kumar Reddy **PHOTO: PTI**

Also receiving a huge round of applause was the newly-crowned chess Grandmaster R. Vaishali, the elder sister of precocious chess talent R. Praggnanandhaa.

Other sporting bigwigs who were chosen for the Arjuna award this year were wrestler Antim Panghal, a former junior world champion and bronze-winner at the senior event last year, boxer Mohammad Hussamuddin (bronze-winner at last year's world championship), and athlete Parul Chaudhary.

While the Khel Ratna comes with a cash prize of Rs 25 lakh, the Arjuna and Dronacharya awards include a cash prize of Rs 15 lakh.

The recipients (2023 awards): Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award for 2023: Chirag Shetty and Satwik Sairaj Rankireddy (badminton).

Arjuna Awards: Ojas Pravin Deotale (archery), Aditi Gopichand Swami (archery), Murali Sreeshankar (athletics), Parul Chaudhary (athletics), Mohammad Hussamuddin (boxing), R Vaishali (chess), Mohammed Shami (cricket), Anush Agarwalla (equestrian), Divyakriti Singh (equestrian dressage), Diksha Dagar (golf), Krishan Bahadur Pathak (hockey), Sushila Chanu (hockey), Pawan Kumar (kabaddi), Ritu Negi (kabaddi), Nasreen (kho-kho), Pinki (lawn bowls), Aishwarya Pratap Singh Tomar (shooting), Esha Singh (shooting), Harinder Pal Singh Sandhu (squash), Ayhika Mukherjee (table tennis), Sunil Kumar (wrestling), Antim Panghal (wrestling), Naorem Roshibina Devi (wushu), Sheetal Devi (para archery), Illuri Ajay Kumar Reddy (blind cricket), Prachi Yadav (para canoeing).

Dronacharya Award (lifetime category) for outstanding coaches: Jaskirat Singh Grewal (golf), Bhaskaran E (kabaddi), Jayanta Kumar Pushilal (table tennis).

Dhyan Chand Award for lMaulana Abul Kalam Azad (MAKA) Trophy 2023: Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar (overall winner university); Lovely Professional University, Punjab (1st runner-up), Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra (2nd runner-up).

—*PTI*

ICC on Tuesday rated the Newlands pitch for the second Test between India and South Africa as "unsatisfactory" **PHOTO: AP**

Now, ICC rates Newlands pitch as unsatisfactory

DUBAI, 9 JAN

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Tuesday rated the Newlands pitch for the second Test between India and South Africa as "unsatisfactory" after it ended inside five sessions.

India defeated the hosts by seven wickets in the match, which turned out to be the shortest-ever in the history of Test cricket. The victory allowed India to draw the two-match series 1-1. The decision was made under the ICC Pitch and Outfield Monitoring Process. Only 642 balls could be bowled in the match. "The pitch in Newlands was very difficult to bat on. The ball bounced quickly and sometimes alarmingly throughout the match, making it difficult to play shots," said Chris Broad, the match referee for the Test, in his report submitted to the ICC. "Several batters were hit on the gloves and many wickets also fell due to the awkward bounce," Broad further wrote. Subsequently, the Newlands was awarded one demerit point. One demerit point is awarded to venues whose pitches and outfields are rated by the match referee as unsatisfactory.

Cricket South Africa has 14 days to appeal against the sanction.If a venue reaches six demerit points, it is suspended from hosting any international cricket for 12 months. The penalty is 24 months in case of 12 demerit points. —*PTI*

Oz win by 7 wickets, clinch series 2-1

MUMBAI, 9 JAN

Australia Women skipper Alyssa Healy saved her best for the last to hand India a crushing seven-wicket defeat in the third and final T20I as the visitors bagged the series 2-1 here Tuesday.

Healy opted to field after calling it correct, and the bowlers responded to her decision to keep India to a modest 147 for six.The stylish batter then returned to crack a 55 off 38 balls laced with nine fours and a six to lead Australia's march to a series win, as for India, this was their fourth consecutive T20I series loss at home since September 2019. India have succumbed to South Africa, Australia and England in this interim.

Chasing 148, Australia raced to 85 for one at the halfway mark courtesy of Healy's onslaught and Beth Mooney's 52 not out (45 balls, 5x4s).A nearly-packed house at the DY Patil Stadium was left disappointed when Indian players failed to bring forth a collective performance — as they did in the first game.

Australia women celebrate after they won the T20 cricket match over India Women, at DY Patil Stadium **PHOTO: PTI**

Pooja Vastrakar dismissed Tahlia McGrath (20) and Ellyse Perry on consecutive balls in the 16th over to create some excitement, but Mooney and Phoebe Litchfield (17 not out) took Australia over the line.But it all started with Healy, as she attacked Titas Sadhu, smacking the pacer for three fours in the fourth over to set the tone for the chase.Healy continued her assault smacking Renuka Singh Thakur for a second 15-run over on the trot, which included a six and two fours.In the seventh over, Healy also had luck favouring her when a full-blooded cut-off Vastrakar was claimed as a catch taken by Jemimah Rodrigues at the point.

India: 147 for 6 in 20 overs (Richa Ghosh 34, Shafali Verma 26, Smriti Mandhana 29; Annabel Sutherland 2/12, Georgia Wareham 2/24).

Australia: 149 for 3 in 18.4 overs (Alyssa Healy 55, Beth Mooney 51 not out; Pooja Vastrakar 2/26).

—*PTI*

Chirag and Lakshya named in Indian squad for BATC

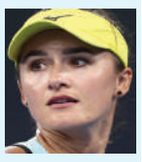
NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

From the hilly terrains of Almora to the bylanes of Bangalore and now together in the national team, it has been quite a journey for Sen brothers Lakshya and Chirag.

While Lakshya was the first to make a mark on the international circuit, newly-crowned Senior National champion Chirag on Tuesday joined him in the Indian team for the Badminton Asia Team Championships scheduled to be held in Shah Alam, Malaysia from 13-19 February. "It is a big moment for us as a family to see both of them in the Indian team. From where they started as kids to reach this stage, I feel quite emotional as a father and as a coach. I feel extremely proud," an emotional father DK Sen, also an accomplished coach, told PTI from Bengaluru. "I am yet to speak to them as they are currently in Kuala Lumpur for the Malaysia Open," added Sen senior, who had stints at NIS Bhopal, Meerut before joining SAI Almora Centre in 1991.Badminton runs in the Sen family with DK Sen picking up the sport from his father, who won several medals competing in All India Civil Services tournaments. —*PTI*

Vondrousova withdraws from Adelaide International

ADELAIDE, 9 JAN



Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova withdrew from the Adelaide International on Tuesday citing a right hip injury, five days before the Australian Open starts in Melbourne.The No. 7-ranked Vondrousova pulled out of the tournament hours before her scheduled first-round match against Russian qualifier Aliaksandra Sasnovich.Taylor Townsend will take her place in the draw.Sixth-seeded Jelena Ostapenko was broken while serving for the match at 5-2 in the third set and missed two match points in the next game before finally fending off Sorana Cirstea 2-6, 6-2, 6-4.The 2017 French Open champion will next play Caroline Garcia, who beat local wildcard entry Taylah Preston, Australia, 6-4, 1-6, 6-3. —*AP*

Players of Mumbai and Bihar greet each other at the end of their Ranji Trophy cricket match, in Patna, on Monday

East Bengal start Super Cup campaign with 3-2 win over Hyd

BHUBANESWAR, 9 JAN

East Bengal FC rode on Cleiton Silva's brace to start their Super Cup football campaign with a fighting 3-2 win over Hyderabad FC at the Kalinga Stadium here on Tuesday.

The Group A fixture saw Hyderabad draw level twice through Ramhlunchhunga and Nim Dorjee Tamang before Saul Crespo scored the winning goal for East Bengal in the 80th minute.

East Bengal have been struggling to score goals this season. But on this day, Silva led from the front as they looked to attack from the outset.

The first significant chance came in the eighth minute when Nishu Kumar delivered a cross from the left flank. Silva managed to head the ball down to Nandhakumar, setting up what seemed like a perfect volley opportunity. However, Nandhakumar's shot struck the crossbar.

East Bengal broke the deadlock in the 33rd minute. The move was initiated by Mohamad Rakip, who played a quick one-two with Nandhakumar on the right flank, before delivering a precise cross into the box that evaded all Hyderabad defenders.

Silva made a timely run into the box and volleyed the ball home to give East Bengal the lead.

Hyderabad FC restored parity in the 45th minute. Mohammad Rafi played a beautiful through ball to Lalchhanhima Sailo on the right flank.

Sailo, with great awareness, tracked back the ball and found Ramhlunchhunga unmarked inside the box, and he calmly sent the ball into the bottom corner of the net.

East Bengal, though, remained undeterred by Hyderabad's equalizer and started the second half with the same attacking mindset.Silva continued to be a key figure in East Bengal's offensive efforts and made a significant impact again in the 54th minute. —*PTI*

Shreyas Iyer added to Mumbai squad for Ranji Trophy game

MUMBAI, 9 JAN

India batter Shreyas Iyer was on Tuesday added to the Mumbai squad for their next Ranji Trophy game against Andhra to be played from 12-15 January. Having struggled with the bat largely during India's two-match Test series in South Africa in challenging conditions, the right-handed batter would be looking to regain form and bolster preparations for the Tests against England beginning 25 January.

Iyer has replaced middle-order batter Sarfaraz Khan, who will join the India A team for the series against England A in Ahmedabad.

However, Mumbai will be without the services of all-rounder Shivam Dube who has been summoned to the national team for the upcoming three-match series starting against Afghanistan beginning on 11 January.

The 41-time winners in the Ranji Trophy, Mumbai, are coming off an outright win against Bihar in Patna.

Mumbai bagged seven points after they crushed Bihar by a margin of an innings and 51 runs with their fast bowlers ruling the roost.

—*PTI*

Shreyas Iyer **PHOTO: PTI**

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Novak Djokovic to Jannik Sinner: Five men to watch

PARIS, 9 JAN

Novak Djokovic is targeting an 11th Australian Open title and in the absence of injured Rafael Nadal several younger players are out to stop him. Here's a list of five men to watch when the first Grand Slam of the year begins on Sunday:

Novak Djokovic

He may be 36 but the 24-time Grand Slam winner is still the man to beat after another hugely successful 2023, which included overcoming Stefanos Tsitsipas in the Melbourne final.

The Serbian finished the year as world number one after winning three of the four majors, with only Carlos Alcaraz at Wimbledon denying him a clean sweep.

In total, Djokovic claimed seven titles to take his career haul to 98, including a record-equalling seventh ATP Tour Finals crown.

Carlos Alcaraz

The 20-year-old Spaniard's triumph over Djokovic on the grass at Wimbledon reinforced his status as the hottest prospect in men's tennis. His breakthrough for a maiden Slam title at the US Open in 2022 made him the youngest champion of a men's major since compatriot Nadal at the 2005 French Open.

He also became the youngest man to ascend to world number one.

Now ranked two, Alcaraz heads into the Australian Open as a serious contender after a year that saw him collect six titles.

Daniil Medvedev

Novak Djokovic, Carlos caraz, Daniil Medvedev, Jannik Sinner and Alex de Minaur **PHOTO: AP**

The 27-year-old Russian is a two-time finalist at the opening Grand Slam of the year. He was outplayed by Djokovic in 2021 before a heart-wrenching defeat by Nadal a year later.

That narrow defeat in 2022 had a profound impact on Medvedev, who struggled to recapture the same form for the rest of the year and slipped out of the world's top 10.

But a resurgent 2023 has again thrust him into the conversation as a title favourite after winning 66 matches, more than any other player on tour last year.

Jannik Sinner

The 22-year-old Italian enjoyed a breakthrough 2023, winning his first Masters title, in Toronto, and making the championship match against Djokovic at the ATP Finals.

He was also instrumental in helping Italy win the Davis Cup, beating Djokovic in three sets along the way.

It led to plenty of praise and expectations that it is only a matter of time before the former champion skier wins a major.

Alex de Minaur

The Australian has emerged as a threat at his home Grand Slam after a sensational start to the year, beating three top 10 players in a row at the United Cup.

They included Djokovic in straight sets, with Alexander Zverev and Taylor Fritz also falling victim to a player who spent the off-season improving his serve and backhand.

It has propelled the 24-year-old into the top 10, the first Australian to achieve the feat since former world number one Lleyton Hewitt in July 2006.

De Minaur's best result in a major is the quarter-finals at the US Open in 2020 and he has never gone beyond the fourth round at Melbourne Park. —*AP*